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August 31, 2016

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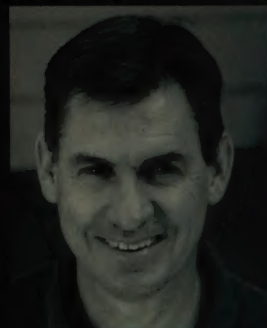
"I loved your presentation. Your story of how you came to humor is wondrous." —Walter Brueggemann, William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary

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From the publisher

Peter W. Marty

Need thy neighbor

On an average day in America, ten churches permanently close their doors. The reasons for closure are often necessary, unavoidable, and even healthy. Rural communities dwindle in size. New traffic and mobility patterns leave once vital churches far off the beaten path. Massive capital expenditures overwhelm available resources. Small congregations struggle to afford a pastor. Sometimes a church will shutter its ministry when an exciting new start-up mission opens nearby.

Often, however, churches close simply because someone missed a window of opportunity years before. Past leadership lacked the will or the nimbleness to flex with changing neighborhood demographics. Nobody put up a basketball hoop that could have formed a beautiful bridge between the congregation and its neighbors. Hosting after-school programs and ESL classes never figured into the church board's imagination. Creative partnerships with area agencies or businesses went unexplored. Sadly, the nature of some of these opportunities is that they're fleeting; once we've missed them, they're gone, never to return.

In "What Mary saw at Cana" (p. 26), Michael J. Buckley, SJ, argues that Christians and their faith communities unconsciously alienate themselves from the social needs and poverty of people outside their walls. In John 2, Mary tells Jesus that the wedding guests are without wine. In a fascinating interpretation of Jesus' response — "What concern is that to you and to me?" — Buckley proposes that Jesus is really asking how the needs of others affect us. To paraphrase: How are we involved in the circumstances of these

people? Does their plight impinge on our lives or force an examination of our consciences?

Buckley wonders if local churches are among those institutions of power and influence that have become "strangers to the massive social inequity and outrageous poverty and humiliation of so many."

As I drive past boarded-up churches in cities that I frequent, I become more and more convinced that many congregations could afford to revisit their neighbor ethic. It's not that we fail to notice the neighbors who live around our churches; it's just that we don't believe we need them. We consider them superfluous to our happiness and inconsequential to our faith. They don't fit the plan for what's going on inside our building. And though these neighbors may live just down the block, they don't tug at our interests if their daily circumstances are too distant from our own.

"Love your neighbor" is not a metaphor. It's a commandment to love the next person we encounter as much as, and as well as, we happen to love ourselves. This can be a tall order for congregations more accustomed to fussing over interior traditions than knowing the lives of people across the street.

Taped to my office bookshelf is a postcard with a William Blake poem: "I sought my soul, but my soul I could not see; I sought my God, but my God eluded me; I sought my neighbor, and I found all three." Plenty of congregations impressively pursue the first two quests. It's the third one that hangs them up.

Reluctance to engage the third pursuit is why a friend of mine believes every congregation ought to own an 11-foot pole—a pole that would help the church deal with all the neighbors it won't touch with a ten-foot pole.

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Cover photo by Amber Slate, Princeton Theological Seminary

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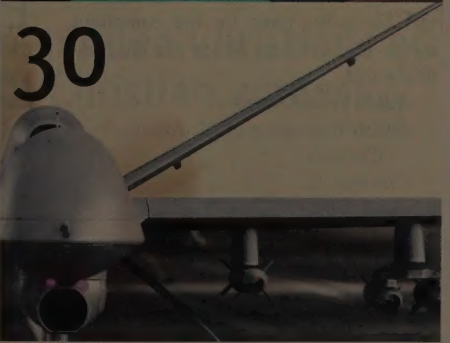
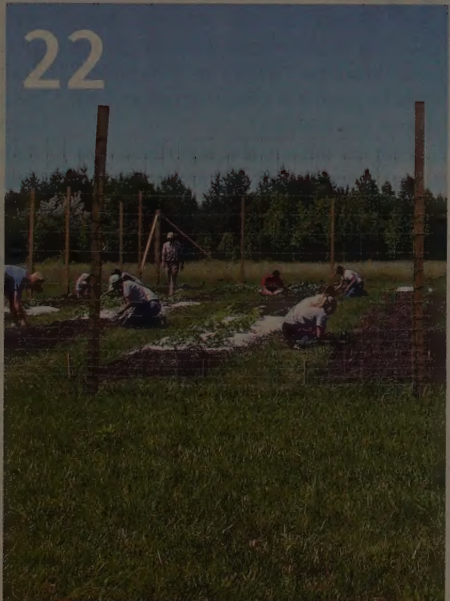
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Defining a blessing

Perhaps I missed it, but I saw no attempt to define the term *blessing* in the August 3 issue with the cover headline "What's in a blessing?" Must I ask what is a blessing before I ask what is in a blessing?

Perhaps not—if the experience precedes understanding. But perhaps understanding should precede an invitation to meaningful conversation. It would be helpful and informative if those who opine and report on their experiences were to pause in their writing to ask, "Have I defined my terms so that others might join in a more common understanding of my expression?" That would be a true gift. It might even be a blessing.

Paul Elbert
Loudon, Tenn.

Steve Thorngate's article "Blest and Kept: Why and how I bless my children" cites the priestly blessing at the end of Numbers 6:24–26. The question is: What is *b'rakha* or blessing in the Torah? With but one exception, all the blessings of the Torah are material ones and are focused on this-worldly matters, namely, health, good food, good shelter, and safety. It seems that the only blessing for the spiritual found in the Torah is in the priestly blessing, "May God give you of the radiance of His Presence." Yet the culmination of the blessing is *shalom*, namely, peace, safety, and security in all manner of the material.

The notion that blessing is about blessings in the material world and in this life is the basis for the commandments of the Torah, which are all about this world.

Rabbi Yehiel Poupko
Jewish Federation of Metropolitan
Chicago
Chicago, Ill.

Seeing whiteness . . .

I do something a bit different in my classes on the issue of race than Reggie Williams does ("Seeing white-

ness," July 20). I ask the white students to write a sentence responding to the phrase "black person"—giving not their own personal response but the ones they hear in their culture. Then I ask the black students to do the same for the phrase "white person." The black students describe white persons with phrases like "can't dance" and "acting superior." The white students come up with terms like *dangerous* and *aggressive* for blacks.

We all live in a world of stereotypes, whether we subscribe to them or not. And we may subscribe to all of them to some extent, even though we know they are not accurate.

Katherine Ellis
New Brunswick, N.J.

Not all white people automatically have it easy, and not all black people automatically have it rough. The challenge is to be aware of each other; to call out injustice when we see it; to help change the status quo that unduly helps the majority; and to be in conversation with people who are different. Consciousness-raising takes effort and work. I am reading Claudia Rankine's new book *Citizen: An American Lyric* and am convicted in a new way.

Erin Thomas
Christiancentury.org comment

Sharing the Eucharist . . .

Every year the churches of Jerusalem observe a week of prayer for Christian unity. The fact that we could not share communion seemed an unfortunate intrusion of the present—until one year when at the conclusion we were all invited to the refectory for refreshments of wine and bread.

Meanwhile, in the West Bank, a Roman Catholic priest served the Eucharist for the interdenominational Christian Peacemaker Team and Operation Dove workers. He explained that canon law allowed him to serve non-Catholics "in an emergency," and

that he considered it to be an emergency whenever a Christian desired the Eucharist.

If Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (*Stealing Jesus*, July 20) wants to call this "stealing," it sure seems to be an inside job.

Rich Meyer
Millersburg, Ind.

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson and Peter W. Marty (*Pastoral sabotage*, July 20) suggest there is a relationship between action and feelings or belief that has generally been ignored in the history of divisions over the Eucharist. The predominant ecclesiastical position has been that participation in the Eucharist (action) should follow theological agreement (belief). However, psychological theory and research suggest another option.

The German philosopher Hans Vaihinger introduced a philosophy of "as if," which was soon transformed into a psychotherapy technique by Alfred Adler. Adler anticipated later psychological research that demonstrates how people form conclusions about themselves (beliefs) by observing their own behavior (actions) and proposed that we can change our beliefs by acting as if we were the person we wish to be.

As Granberg-Michaelson points out, ecclesiastical disobedience (acting as if) can be a powerful tool for moving toward Eucharistic sharing. Imagine celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation by acting as if we had one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Harold Schroeder
Oro Valley, Ariz.

Worth it . . .

Every quarter or so, you publish an issue that is itself worth a year's subscription. For me, the July 20 issue was it. Thank you.

Jim Metcalf
Arcadia, Mich.

August 31, 2016

True witness, absurd violence

Pope Francis's response last month to the killing of a French Catholic priest by Islamic terrorists caused consternation inside and outside the Catholic Church. Critics were dismayed that Francis refused to place the brutal murder of Father Jacques Hamel into a narrative of religious or civilizational conflict. "If I speak of Islamic violence, I must speak of Catholic violence," he said. And in condemning the murder, the pope avoided the term *martyr*, calling the killing an act of "absurd violence."

Francis's use of the word *absurd* was puzzling to some. The pope seemed to be willfully or naively ignoring what—to others—was the obvious meaning of the deed. One observer declared that the murder was a "purposeful act of war on Judeo-Christian civilization." *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat concluded that the pope is so attached to the progressive ideology of religious tolerance that he cannot grasp the threatening realities of our time, which "promises something more complicated and more dangerous than the liberal imagination, secular and Catholic, envisioned 50 years ago."

But Francis was not indulging in wishful thinking, and his statement did something even more significant than resist lumping all Muslims with terrorists. To recognize a murder as absurd requires a special kind of theological courage, the courage that comes from faith in a God who transcends the narratives by which humans so eagerly seek to endow violence with meaning.

In doing so, Francis was reminding Christians of the true nature of Christian witness. Many people are devoted enough to a cause that they are willing to die for it; Christians are not unique in that respect. What marks a true witness to Christ is that their suffering imitates Christ's passion by absorbing violence rather than exciting it or provoking more of it. Christ's suffering and death was not meant to be avenged or to be the basis for more—and even more "meaningful"—violence; it was meant rather to show the emptiness of such killing and spell the end of such sacrifices.

Islamic terrorists dream of a messianic struggle that will transform the world. But for Christians, as Francis understands, the world has already been transformed by the sacrifice of Christ, and so they are called to resist such dreams and counter-dreams. That's what Francis is doing, and his witness helps us better understand the witness of Father Hamel.

Pope Francis has reminded Christians of the true nature of Christian witness.

CENTURY marks

BEATEN SWORDS: Jeremy Lucas, pastor of Christ Church in Lake Oswego, Oregon, purchased 150 tickets in a raffle sponsored by a girls' softball team in which the top prize was an AR-15 rifle. His announced aim was to win the rifle and then destroy it. He won the rifle and is now working with an artist on turning it into some kind of inspirational symbol. After he made his intentions for the rifle known, he received some threatening messages (KATU News, July 25).

NEVER TOO LATE: A group of Amish in Pennsylvania met with representatives of 12 Native American tribes to apologize to them for the way their ancestors treated them during colonial times. The pacifist Amish didn't fight indigenous people, but they did settle

on their land. Gifts were exchanged between the Amish and the Native Americans. A representative of the Shawnee tribe formally accepted the Amish apology. Several tribes took the occasion to work toward reconciliation with each other over long-standing land conflicts (Lancaster Online, August 1).

CALHOUN AT YALE: Three months ago Yale University announced it had decided to keep John C. Calhoun's name on one of its residential colleges. Calhoun was a defender of slavery before the Civil War and a notorious racist. Yale defended its decision, saying that the sordid history associated with slavery couldn't be expunged from the record, and the presence of Calhoun's name on campus should

encourage wrestling with that history. After widespread objections from faculty members and students, Yale recently announced the formation of a committee to study the issue. In a widely cited essay, American history professor Matthew Frye Jacobson asked: "Have you ever reflected on how it might feel to go to school and be assigned to a residential college named for Joseph Goebbels?" (*Inside Higher Ed*, August 2).

CLASSROOM DIVERSITY: A growing body of research indicates that diversity in the classroom contributes to childhood development. Kids who make friends with kids from other races in school are better able to handle diversity and their academic performance is improved, according to a study done at New York University. Without assistance from teachers, however, the tendency over time is for same-race relations to increase and cross-race relations to decrease (NPR, July 12).

REPPRESSED PAST: When Margaret Biser led tours at a historic location in the South that included a plantation, she'd occasionally get hostile responses from people who didn't want to hear about slavery. Many white people expressed genuine ignorance about the slaves. They suggested that slave owners took care of their slaves out of the goodness of their hearts rather than economic self-interest. Many realized that field slaves had a hard life, but they thought that house slaves had a sweet deal (*Vox*, June 19).

MASS BENEFIT: Despite rising rates of suicide among women, one female group bucks that trend: highly devout, practicing Catholic women. Of the 6,999 Catholic women in a study group who



"I do plenty—that meme I posted on Facebook will go a long way toward healing the nation."

said they attend mass more than once a week, there was not a single suicide. Protestant women who worship weekly are far less likely to take their own lives than women who seldom or never attend services, yet devout Protestant women were seven times more likely to commit suicide than devout Catholic women. Although the Catholic Church has traditionally taught that suicide is a mortal sin, it has in recent years softened that stance, taking into account that psychological disturbances can contribute to suicide (*Los Angeles Times*, June 29).

STANDING TOGETHER: In a show of solidarity, Muslims across France attended mass with Catholics following the murder of a priest in a church near Rouen last month. Two men who had pledged allegiance to ISIS slit the throat of the priest and held some other people hostage. They were later killed by police outside the church. “We are all Catholics of France,” said the head of the French Muslim council (BBC, July 31).

UNDER SIEGE: Attacks on Coptic Christians in Egypt are spiraling out of control, according to Bishop Angaelos, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom. These attacks have been fueled by inflammatory rumors that Christians are building new churches in Egypt and that Christians and Muslims have engaged in affairs. In one instance, a 70-year-old man was stripped and paraded naked through the streets of Minya before he was killed. Coptic churches and the homes of Coptic Christians have been torched. Lack of local law enforcement, says Bishop Angaelos, gives license to more attacks by radicals (*Christian Today*, July 25).

DEFAULT: When you register for a driver’s license in the United States you are asked if you’d like to be an organ donor. It’s an “opt-in” question, and only about 40 percent of people choose that option. In Spain, Portugal, and Austria, you’re considered an organ donor unless you opt out. In those countries about 99 percent of the people are registered as organ donors, and there are a higher number of transplants as a result (ProPublica, July 27).

“Conservative intellectuals, and conservative politicians, have been in kind of a bubble. We’ve had this view that the voters were with us on conservatism—philosophical, economic conservatism. In reality, the gravitational center of the Republican Party is white nationalism.”

— Avik Roy, a conservative intellectual, who has worked for three Republican presidential hopefuls (*Vox*, July 25)

“If I talk about Islamic violence, then I also have to talk of Catholic violence. Not all Muslims are violent, just like not all Catholics are violent.”

— Pope Francis, explaining why he doesn’t talk about Islamic violence (NBC News, August 1)

GOOD NEWS ON WAGES: It has been popular on the left to point out that the richest 1 percent of people have captured 99 percent of all new income since the recovery from the great recession. But that figure is out of date. The income gains by the 1 percent are down to 57 percent. Incomes for people outside the 1 percent increased by 3.9 percent last year, the highest figure since 1999. As the number of unemployed people has shrunk, workers are again able to demand higher wages. Walmart, Starbucks, Target, and McDonald’s have raised employee salaries (*New York Magazine*, July 27).

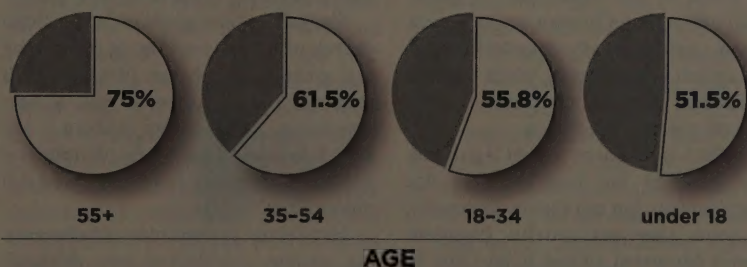
MURROW MOMENT: When broadcaster Edward R. Murrow wrapped up a 1954 documentary on Joseph

McCarthy, the demagogic anticommunist senator from Wisconsin, he said that McCarthy “didn’t create this situation of fear—he merely exploited it, and rather successfully.” Murrow added that this was not the time for people who opposed McCarthy’s methods to remain silent. Today no one in the news media today has the stature or the audience that Murrow had in the 1950s. Most reporters and commentators have been reluctant to push back against Donald Trump’s rhetoric and falsehoods, lest they be charged with partisanship. However, when leading Republican figures speak out against Trump, reporters are given some cover for challenging Trump’s claims (*Columbia Journalism Review*, July 15).

FADING WHITES

SOURCE: BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

The percentage of white Americans*



*from 2015 Census data

Unshakable in Uganda

by Jeff Chu

CLARE BYARUGABA was in church on a Sunday in 2009 when her pastor urged his congregation to sign a petition backing antigay legislation being considered in Uganda's parliament. She surveyed the massive sanctuary of her evangelical megachurch in Kampala, Uganda's capital. "How many gay people," she wondered, "are in this place?"

Most of those gathered for worship that day, like an overwhelming majority of Ugandans, agreed with their pastor that homosexuality is sinful and unacceptable—so much so that, as the proposed bill specified, the death penalty should apply in some cases of same-sex activity. But Byarugaba knew that she wasn't the only LGBTQ person in church.

"It was so, so painful," she recalls, "because homophobia had found us in church. The people who were supposed to bring you closer to God were calling for your death." She said a prayer for those unknown others. Then she made a decision: "That was the last time I went to church."

In 2005, Uganda became the first nation in Africa and the second in the world (Honduras was first) to adopt an explicit ban against same-sex marriage. That no country had done so before reflects how inconceivable same-sex marriage has been in most of the world. In the decade since, Uganda, which is 80 percent Christian and 15 percent Muslim, has repeatedly considered other laws against homosexuality, which was first criminalized there by the British colonial authorities in the 19th century.

In 2013, parliament passed legislation that included the possibility of life imprisonment, but not the death penalty, for some same-sex activity. President Yoweri Museveni signed it into law in 2014. Soon afterward, though, the

nation's highest court nullified the legislation, immediately igniting calls for new parliamentary proposals.

The global press covered this legal wrangling extensively. Much less has been written about how the political and social climate has affected the spiritual lives of LGBTQ Ugandans like Byarugaba, 29, one of the country's most prominent LGBTQ activists. She works for Chapter Four, a nonprofit advocacy group for civil rights. Like most Ugandans—and like most of Uganda's LGBTQ population—she is deeply spiritual. But maintaining her faith has not been easy.

Byarugaba was reared Anglican. Her father, who farmed and also ran a small hotel, played the organ at All Saints Church in the town of Kabale, in Uganda's verdant southwest. Her childhood was happy, and she adored church. "I never really questioned my faith or the Bible. I was in a certain place with God, and it was good," she says. When she reminisces about youth choir, her face glows: "I loved it. We had a live band. And I loved how excited it made my mum. It was good. It was all good."

It was in choir that Byarugaba first noticed her same-sex attraction. "I'd be checking out girls," she says, "but in a holy way, like, 'I appreciate you, girl!'"

She cajoled her girlfriends to attend church with her—her way of reconciling the great loves of her life: God and women. "I used to call myself a non-practicing, God-fearing lesbian," she says, laughing. "I knew my identity was not going anywhere, but I said, 'God will deal with it.'"

Her family proved more challenging. As antigay legislation was debated, newspapers published pictures of mem-

bers of the LGBTQ community, and Byarugaba appeared on the front page of the popular tabloid *Red Pepper*. "That brought insecurity to myself, shame to my family," she says. Her father suggested that she leave the country. Her mother said, "All my friends' daughters are getting married. You are going to bring me so much shame."

She has repeatedly apologized to her mother. "I'm the only girl," she explains, her shoulders slumping. "My mum gave birth to seven boys looking for me. She did want a daughter very badly, and I did everything right growing up." She lowers her voice nearly to a whisper: "This is the one thing I couldn't change. And the worst thing that could happen to a parent is the thing I burdened my mother with."

Last year, Byarugaba finally told her mother that she would never marry a man and confessed that she had a girlfriend. Her mother said, "You have the devil in you!" Byarugaba smiles weakly. "By my mom's standards, that was a good reaction. I expected violence. I expected the threats she had given to me before. She has said, 'I will take you to the police myself.' . . . She has told me, 'I'd rather have a drunkard child or a drug addict than a lesbian daughter.'"

Such stories often get recounted in Western reports of Ugandan homophobia. But Byarugaba detests oversimplified depictions that perpetuate stereotypes of a backward Uganda and a progressive West. "The biggest misunderstanding is that people are savage here just because they are homophobic," she said. "I don't see it that way. There are not people with machetes outside waiting to kill me. There is good in all people, but they have been taught to hate and they have been taught to fear."

She also urges a more sophisticated understanding of the challenges facing Uganda's LGBTQ community. "Violence is not only when you are beaten in the streets," she says. "Violence is if you cannot live without fear. Violence is the fear that something could happen." She believes that, alongside discrimination, poverty deserves more attention. A fifth of the population still survives on less than \$1 a day, and the effects of poverty are particularly acute at the grass roots, which is why Byarugaba hires members of the LGBTQ community to do odd jobs that she could do herself. She also takes gay homeless youth into her home, appointing herself their surrogate elder sister.

Corruption is a major problem. In some sense, it offers an opportunity to the handful of wealthier LGBTQ people, who can buy some protection from the authorities. But there's also a myth in Uganda that most LGBTQ people are rich, so they've become targets for bribery and extortion. If you're arrested for sexuality-related reasons in Uganda, your case probably won't go to trial. "Most of the cases are never prosecuted, for lack of evidence," Byarugaba says. "But police see it as an opportunity. You bribe them."

According to Stella Nyanzi, a prominent social scientist who has researched Uganda's LGBTQ community extensively, corruption is rampant in the LGBTQ activist community as it is throughout Ugandan society. Though nobody will name names on the record, several prominent activists are widely said to have siphoned Western funding for personal use. "Clare is one of the few activists," Nyanzi says, "who says, 'We shall not cheat. We will not steal that money.'"

None of this is to underestimate the tremendous sociopolitical challenges. In early August, police raided a Pride event, arresting Byarugaba and other activists. Though she was released without charge, the rest of the Pride event—which she was helping to organize—was postponed after Simon Lokodo, the state minister of ethics and integrity, allegedly threatened to mobilize opponents to disrupt it.

Byarugaba knows that change will come painstakingly. She's now raising funds to develop programs that help parents understand their LGBTQ children. "Because homophobia is learned, it can



OUT IN UGANDA: Clare Byarugaba works for LGBTQ civil rights.

be unlearned," she said. "Even if [parents] want to accept their children, they don't know how," she said. "There is so much shame." Discussing religion will be necessary. She cited the story of a lesbian teenager whose parents sought an exorcism because they didn't like her friends or how she dressed. Byarugaba has considered support groups, but doubts anyone would attend; the initial work will have to be one-on-one. "I wish I could advertise on the radio: 'Parents of homos! Come and partake of understanding your children better!' But I can't. It will be a very incremental, slow process," she said. "They also have to go through their own coming-out process."

Byarugaba occasionally refers to her "lost" Christianity. This is hyperbole. One Sunday, she texted to tell me that she was ready to return to her church in Kampala for the first time since 2009. When I found her outside the building, she was wearing a black T-shirt with a portrait of Jesus in sunglasses and the caption "I'll be back." "Are you ready?" I asked. "Let's go," she said.

By the time we found seats in the auditorium's balcony, the opening praise medley had already begun. At first, Byarugaba just stared at the lyrics on the big screen as worshipers sang and danced around us. But when the praise team launched into "Unshakable," a rollicking song from the Australian Pentecostal church Citipointe that paraphrases Isaiah 61, Byarugaba

started to sing: "You make beauty from ashes / Turn sorrow into dancing."

Isaiah 61 seems apt for Byarugaba and her work. "The spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me," it says, "because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives."

In that work, Byarugaba has found some healing for herself too. Several months after we went to church together, she took her girlfriend home to Kabale to meet her family. They attended Sunday worship at Byarugaba's childhood church. Her girlfriend "had always wanted to see me relating to God in one way or another. That's a side of me that she doesn't really see."

During worship, Byarugaba began to daydream about getting married in that church—"the church I grew up in, where I was baptized, where I went to Sunday school," she says. "I know in my lifetime that it might not happen." But the dream itself was important. "I felt safe enough to imagine it." She smiles at the memory and all it represents: that unexpected feeling of reassurance, that surprising sense of home, as she sat in church with the woman she loves beside her. **CC**

Jeff Chu is a journalist and author of Does Jesus Really Love Me? His research in Uganda was supported by an International Reporting Project fellowship. Timothy Meinck also contributed reporting for this story.

Orthodox leaders hold historic council

For the first time in 1,200 years, and after 55 years of preparatory conversations, the Holy and Great Council of the Eastern Orthodox churches met—though without representatives of four churches, including the largest. Leaders at the council came to consensus on an encyclical covering issues that all of the Orthodox churches had deemed priorities.

The historic summit of the 14 Orthodox member churches was called by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, who is considered first among equals. The gathering aimed to promote unity among the faithful who had become separated by geography, language, and customs and to help the churches speak with harmony on major issues facing them and other faiths.

But the Russian Orthodox Church, which alone accounts for about two-thirds of the 250 million to 300 million Orthodox believers around the world, did not send its leaders to the June 20–26 meeting on the Greek island of Crete after calling for the session to be postponed a week prior to its opening.

Three smaller churches also did not attend: those of Bulgaria, Georgia, and the Damascus-based Patriarchate of Antioch. (The Antioch Church did not attend because of a dispute with the Jerusalem Patriarchate over who has jurisdiction over the Orthodox in Qatar.)

Yet even with an incomplete list of participants, the council—which began on the day the Orthodox celebrated Pentecost—was still the largest held by the Orthodox churches in all of history, said John Chryssavgis, spokesman for the council. Interest from many in Orthodox churches shows they want more unity than they now have.

“It is painful that they’re not all here,” Chryssavgis said, stressing that all 14 churches had signed the consensus documents prepared for the council. “We’re talking about hundreds of signatures by each church committing to the council.”

The churches’ absence came against a backdrop of larger tensions within Orthodoxy. Traditionalists oppose any change despite growing pressure to make some adjustments. And in the past quarter century, the rich and powerful Russian church has become an influential player on the international religious scene.

The Orthodox are organized as national churches with jurisdiction within their national borders. The ecumenical patriarch is the symbolic head but only has administrative power over his own

flock of fewer than 3,000 congregants in Turkey.

“Orthodoxy doesn’t feel like one church,” said Carol Lupu, a theologian and former adviser to the Serbian church, which had called for the summit to be postponed but ultimately sent its delegation.

The Orthodox first considered holding a council in 1961, shortly before Catholics opened the Second Vatican Council, which passed several modernizing reforms. Preparations dragged out over the years as theologians worked on consensus documents. The initial list of about 100 issues to consider was whittled down to the six documents approved in January, covering the mission of the Orthodox Church, the Orthodox diaspora, autonomy, fasting, ecumenical relations, and marriage.



DECADES IN THE MAKING: At the conclusion of a summit of Eastern Orthodox churches meeting for the first time in 1,200 years, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew (center) presides over the Orthodox and Synodal Divine Liturgy and concelebrates with the primates of the local Orthodox churches at Saints Peter and Paul Church in Chania, Crete.

PHOTO © JOHN MINDALA, USED VIA CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE

In the document on ecumenical relations, some traditionalists objected to using the word *churches* for other denominations, insisting that Orthodoxy is the only “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.”

Yet the encyclical commits to dialogue with other Christians: “Through this dialogue, the rest of the Christian world is now more familiar with Orthodoxy and the authenticity of its tradition. It also knows that the Orthodox Church has never accepted theological minimalism or permitted its dogmatic tradition and evangelical ethos to be called into question.”

Prior to the council, the churches acknowledged in the document on the Orthodox diaspora that they cannot solve the problem of overlapping jurisdictions in countries where immigrants of different ethnic groups each have their own church and bishop. The associ-

ation of Orthodox bishops in France, for example, lists ten different churches among its members.

The encyclical states that “the principle of autocephaly cannot be allowed to operate at the expense of the principle of the catholicity and the unity of the Church.”

The encyclical also covers topics such as globalization, environmental issues, and the plight of refugees.

Bartholomew sees this council as the first step toward restoring these consultative meetings, which were more regular in times before the Great Schism of 1054 between Rome and Constantinople.

“The Ecumenical Patriarch is saying this is a huge step toward that; it should be a beginning to many, many more councils,” Chrysavgis said. “We’re taking the first steps very slowly.” —Tom Heneghan, Religion News Service; the CHRISTIAN CENTURY staff

Interfaith Kosovo gathering builds on area’s historic Muslim-Jewish friendship

Three years ago, Joshua Stanton was walking around Peja, a Balkan city where the skyline includes the minarets of three historic mosques, when he decided to put on his yarmulke.

“I am Jewish,” he thought. “I want to put it on.”

This was not something he would do in France, Germany, or other places where anti-Semitism is on the rise. But Stanton, a young rabbi visiting from New Jersey, felt different in this region.

The reaction from people in the street—most of them Muslims—astonished him. People came up to him, grabbed him by the hand, asked where

Presbyterians elect new leaders, skip fossil fuel divestment

THE GENERAL Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was marked by several firsts: it elected a black man for the 1.6-million-member denomination’s top leadership role, chose comoderators for the general assembly, and added a confession from the Global South to the church’s Book of Confessions.

Meeting June 18–25 in Portland, Oregon, delegates also voted 490–91 against immediate divestment from fossil fuels. Instead, they chose selective, phased-in divestment paired with corporate engagement.

And they also opted for a study of the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement in the Israel-Palestine conflict, including opposition to it, rather than calling for an end to any support of BDS.

Delegates elected J. Herbert Nelson, director of the PCUSA Office of Public Witness, to a four-year term as stated clerk beginning August 1.

He said the denomination “is not dying, but I believe we are reforming. Only through the eyes of faith can we see beyond death.”

Nelson succeeds Gradye Parsons, who is retiring after 37 years of ordained ministry.

The denomination, which is more than 90 percent white, also broke

Gigi Goshorn, a young adult advisory delegate from the Lake Michigan Presbytery, was impressed by the evident friendship between the two women.

“It’s clear that each of them could have done this by themselves, but they have chosen to do it together,” she said.

Decades after it was birthed in South Africa by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church during its movement against apartheid, the Confession of Belhar is now the 12th of those recognized in the PCUSA’s Book of Confessions.

“Your decision affirms that, like those other historic standards of faith, the Belhar Confession transcends its historic circumstances as a standard for faith in all places and times,” Godfrey Betha of the United

Reformed Church in Southern Africa said to the assembly after the vote. “Your decision affirms to your church, to all: when you come looking for the demon of racism, don’t come to us.” —the CHRISTIAN CENTURY staff from reporting by General Assembly News



New leadership (l. to r.): J. Herbert Nelson, T. Denise Anderson, and Jan Edmiston

new ground by choosing comoderators of the assembly for the first time: T. Denise Anderson of National Capital Presbytery, who is black, and Jan Edmiston, a presbytery executive from Chicago, who is white.

American Bible Society looks back, ahead

As the American Bible Society marks its 200th anniversary, and after a series of leadership changes and a recent move to Philadelphia, its leaders are looking to the nation's past in planning for the future.

"When you turn 200 and you're looking at another century, you ask really big questions," said Geof Morin, senior vice president for ministry mobilization.

One question is, Who in the world today cannot read scripture in their own language?

There are about 1,800 languages in which scripture does not exist, Morin said. The ABS estimates it will take about ten years to provide scripture to them.

While translation has always been part of the society's work, there is now "a sharpened focus" on it thanks to current president Roy Peterson, Morin said. Peterson, who spent decades working on Bible translation, joined the ABS in 2014.

The mission of the organization remains what it was in 1816: making the Bible available to all people in a way they can understand and afford. But "the work of doing that is slightly different in 2016 than it was in 1816," Morin said.

The ABS continues to distribute Bibles, currently through partnerships in 200 countries and territories.

After 199 years in New York City, the society moved last year to new headquarters in Philadelphia, with a 25-year lease on two floors of a building shared with Wells Fargo.

The building is just off of Independence Mall, which attracts 2.5 million visitors each year. The society has been getting to know its Jewish neighbors: on one side of the building is the National Museum of American Jewish History and on the other Congregation Mikveh Israel, the oldest continuously meeting synagogue in the United States.

Albert E. Gabbai, rabbi of Mikveh

Israel, shared with the ABS an idea he first had about 25 years ago, a few years after he became the leader of the congregation: to create a Religious Heritage Trail, like the Freedom Trail in Boston. Nearby Christ Church, where many revolutionary leaders attended, would be a another stop on the trail.

Partnering with the ABS is among the latest efforts in Mikveh Israel's his-

tory of interfaith collaboration, dating back to its founding in 1740, Gabbai noted.

"It is nice to have two old institutions that are still around, two spiritual institutions that care about the spiritual aspect of the nation," he said of working with the ABS.

The influence of both Jewish and Christian scripture on U.S. history will be highlighted also in another project the ABS is planning to launch in 2018: a 40,000-foot Faith and Liberty Discovery Center on the first floor of the building housing its offices.

With the center, the ABS hopes to counter some of the negative ideas about the Bible, Morin said, noting a specific finding from research the organization did with Barna Group. The percentage of adults 18 and over who have a negative perception of some kind about the Bible doubled from 10 percent in 2011 to 21 percent in 2016.

That group is among those the Bible society wants to reach by showing how the Bible shaped not only the nation's founding, but also the abolition of slavery, civil rights, women's rights, education, health care, and care of the disenfranchised in our society, Morin said.

"What if they could see something of the role of the Bible in something they see as important, our nation?" he said. In this way the society hopes to break down bias and preformed ideas, Morin said.

"In the U.S. the issue is not access," he said. "The challenge is, What is the popular perspective of the scriptures?"

Morin, an Episcopal priest, sees similar challenges for mainline churches, Catholic churches, Orthodox churches, and evangelical churches.

"Inside and outside of the church, people are getting the same media messages about the Bible, the same distractions that pull them away," he said.



COMMON HERITAGE: The statue Religious Liberty in front of the National Museum of American Jewish History, her outstretched hand symbolizing protection of religious faith, stands across from the building that now houses the American Bible Society in Philadelphia. The society, which celebrates its 200th anniversary this year, is partnering with the museum and other Jewish neighbors on projects highlighting the influence of Jewish and Christian scripture in U.S. history.

PHOTO BY CELESTIE KENNEL-SHANK, THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY



CHICAGO CLERGY Craig Marantz, rabbi of Emanuel Congregation, and Otis Moss III, senior pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ, converse next to a memorial for Martin Luther King Jr. and the march he led in Chicago in 1966 for integrated neighborhoods and schools and fairness in hiring and housing. The march was met by an angry mob of local residents, one of whom knocked King down with a thrown rock. The memorial, unveiled August 5 on the 50th anniversary of the march, is in Marquette Park, where the march took place. The following day some 1,000 people marched in the Marquette Park neighborhood. Chants and signs were eclectic. Many people carried printed placards saying "We want a beloved community." The memorial and march were the work of an interfaith planning committee led by the Inner-City Muslim Action Network, a community organization. —CKS

The society aims to aid people in engaging scripture, including through the use of technology. One project involves biometrics, such as in a Fitbit bracelet, to show people Bible verses attuned to whether they are feeling anxious, for example.

"We see again and again and again that scripture has a wonderful ability to engage people," Morin said.

John Fea, author of *The Bible Cause: A History of the American Bible Society*, noted that the emphasis on engaging people in scripture can alter the society's mission. A focus on single verses, for example, is a shift from the society's focus on publishing and selling Bibles.

For a large part of the society's history, Fea said, "tonnage was the measure of success, based on the number of boxes they distributed."

Beginning in 1816, the society published the Bible "without note or comment," leaving interpretation to denominations, Fea said. In one case, a group of Baptists wanted the ABS to translate the Greek word *baptizo* as "immerse." The society refused because that was seen as endorsing a particular mode of baptism, Fea said.

For most of the 20th century, the ABS was associated with Protestant ecumenism, working closely with mainline denominations, the National Council of Churches, and the World Council of Churches, Fea said. That began to shift in the 1990s, when Eugene Habecker was president.

"He saw the future of Bible reading as in the evangelical churches rather than in the mainline," Fea said.

The ABS board was made up mostly of liberal mainline Protestants, whom Habecker saw as not representative of American Christianity, Fea said. So when some board members' terms ended, he replaced them with evangelicals or conservative Catholics.

"There was not a rejection of mainline Protestants by any means," Fea said. Yet the ABS "will gravitate to those within the mainline denominations who take a more evangelical approach to Christianity."

The decade culminating with the society's move from New York was rocky.

The board of trustees let go of Paul Irwin, president from 2005 to 2008, after an investigation into financial mismanagement. With the recession of 2008, the ABS faced financial difficulties, includ-

ing the need to bring its 12-story building up to code, Fea said.

The board fired another president, Doug Birdsall, before his inauguration in 2013. Birdsall represented the group who wanted the ABS to stay in New York City, Fea said. Birdsall had promoted a plan to get the ABS out of debt by creating a conference center and hotel. But the board decided to move, selling its property for \$300 million.

After that tumult, the current president, Peterson, is seen as bringing stability, Fea said.

Today, in addition to working on scripture translation, the ABS is also publishing study notes that are specific to a denomination.

"They are now a ministry designed to help people engage the Bible," Fea said. "They're open to working with anyone who is interested in promoting the Bible, anyone who thinks the Bible can transform individual lives and American society." —Celeste Kennel-Shank, the CHRISTIAN CENTURY

Party conventions reveal new lines in culture wars

Since the late 1970s, the political battle lines in the culture wars have been clearly drawn and easily understood.

On one side, Republicans have claimed a moral high ground built on appeals to patriotism, family values, personal character, and traditional standards of sexuality.

Democrats, on the other side, have shunned anything that smacked of moralism, sticking to general principles about tolerance and respect for personal choices. Their bully pulpit was reserved for wonky arguments that Democrats were better at economic policies and running the government. Patriotism was often equated with militarism.

But by the time the closing gavel came down on July 28 at the Democratic National Convention, the battlefield in the culture wars had shifted.

A week earlier in Cleveland, the Republican convention had nominated Donald Trump, a New York real estate magnate and reality TV personality who has been married three times.

In Trump's speech accepting the nomination, which the political neophyte had wrested from the establishment by riding a wave of economic anxiety and stoking populist resentment, he said: "Any politician who does not grasp this danger is not fit to lead our country." He added, "I alone can fix it."

God went unmentioned and virtually unrecognized in Trump's speech, which made a passing reference to evangelicals who had supported him in the primaries. Throughout the campaign Trump has struggled to speak convincingly or with any fluency about faith and his own beliefs, and he made no attempt to elevate his God-talk game in Cleveland.

Nor was Trump, or any of the other speakers over the four days of the Republican convention, much interested in traditional culture war topics.

Abortion was never cited in Trump's 75-minute speech, the first time since 1980 that a nominee has passed over the topic, and few others at the convention raised what is a premier issue for Christian conservatives—a fact widely noted by antiabortion groups.

Religious freedom, also a prominent agenda item for the religious right, was given short shrift, and Trump went out of his way to vow to protect "our LGBT citizens." Silicon Valley tech mogul Peter Thiel even delivered a prime-time speech in which he said he was "proud to be gay" and declared that "fake culture wars only distract us from our economic decline."

Then came the Democratic convention, meeting in the birthplace of the American Revolution to choose Hillary Clinton as the first woman to head a presidential ticket.

But after the first day, the convention's speakers increasingly spoke with the vocabulary of faith and moral righteousness.

President Obama gave an oration on Wednesday night, declaring that Trump was neither very Republican nor especially conservative, with some commentators comparing parts of Obama's speech to Ronald Reagan's rhetoric.

Promoting the common good, defending the weak, providing good jobs, and working for equal rights for all were recast in biblical terms, peaking with an address by William Barber, an African-American pastor from North Carolina known for leading Moral Mondays protests.

"I know it may sound strange," Barber told the cheering crowd, "but I'm a conservative because I worked to conserve a divine tradition that teaches us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God."

A retired four-star general, John Allen, flanked by other military leaders, gave a full-throated defense of the U.S. military and an endorsement of Clinton as commander-in-chief.

"The free peoples of the world look to America as the last best hope for peace and for liberty for all humanity, for we are the greatest country on this planet!" he said.

He was accompanied by regular chants of "USA! USA!" from the raucous crowd.

When Clinton herself took the stage, she hit all those themes and made sure to mention God, her Methodist faith, her love of country, and praise for the military and law enforcement.

This effort went beyond the idea of creating a religious left to counter the old religious right. In this new-old vision, LGBTQ families are to be valued as much as any other families, helping single and working mothers is a holy duty, and defending one's nation in the armed forces is an honorable calling—for women, LGBTQ people, and minorities, as much as anyone.

In perhaps the most controversial reworking, abortion got far more play in Philadelphia than in Cleveland, though as a culture war motif of the left in which the right to abortion is almost sacred. Unlike past conventions, abortion opponents were effectively shut out.

"Democrats are learning to present conservative cultural arguments for positions that used to be perceived as subversive," wrote *Slate's* William Saletan. "Liberals aren't always comfortable with this kind of talk. They're skittish about religion, lifestyle norms, or anything that smacks of judgment. But judgment, like sex, is something we all do, even if we don't admit it. We might as well do it right."

—David Gibson, Religion News Service

Rare biblical mosaics uncovered in ancient Galilee synagogue

Unusual mosaics depicting biblical scenes—one of Noah's ark, the other of the parting of the Red Sea—were uncovered this summer by archaeologists excavating a fifth-century synagogue at Huqoq, an ancient Jewish village near the Sea of Galilee.

A consortium of universities, led by Jodi Magness of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, uncovered the mosaics during its fifth annual excavation in June.

Magness said the mosaics, like others discovered at the synagogue since 2012, are of "extremely high artistic quality."

The Noah's ark mosaic includes pairs of bears, donkeys, leopards, camels, lions, ostriches, and snakes, just as described in the book of Genesis.

The mosaic of the parting of the Red Sea features pharaoh's soldiers drowning with their horses and chariots.

"Of course the story of Noah's ark and the parting of the Red Sea were known to Jews, as well as Christians, at the time because they read the Hebrew Bible," Magness said. "We have other ancient synagogues where these scenes are depicted, though they are not common in synagogue art."

The archaeologist said excavation experts dug down to a level of soil where, based on findings elsewhere at the site, they hoped mosaics might be found.

"As our site conservator, Orna Cohen, worked methodically to brush away the dirt, little by little, we all stood around and began to see animals. At some point we realized this was a depiction of Noah's ark."

Deciphering the second mosaic was harder, Magness said.

"We could see little bits and pieces of people, fish, chariots," she said. "We all stood around and guessed" whether the mosaic depicted a biblical story and if so, which one.

It is the parting of the Red Sea, but with a twist on the biblical story: a large fish is swallowing pharaoh's soldiers.

News analysis



UNUSUAL SCENE: A mosaic shows a fish swallowing one of pharaoh's soldiers in the parting of the Red Sea. The mosaic was found in the ancient synagogue at Huqoq.

"This represents an elaboration on the story that must have been circulating at the time," she said.

The mosaics have been removed from the site for conservation and study.

A previously discovered mosaic from the site that depicts Samson carrying the gate of Gaza on his shoulders (Judges 16:3) is on display at Kibbutz Ginosar, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Magness would love to see the mosaics eventually restored to the Huqoq synagogue, and there are conversations at high levels about that possibility, she said.

"It would require an enormous investment of money to develop the site, a building with a guard and cooperation between different government authorities that would have to take responsibility. Who owns the land? Who would maintain it?"

Nathan Elkins, assistant professor of art history at Baylor University, another one of the participating schools, served as coin specialist at the excavation site, according to a university statement.

"The ancient coins at Huqoq," he said, "span 2,300 years at the site and are critical for our knowledge of the monumental synagogue and the associated village." —Michele Chabin, Religion News Service; added source

Anglican Church of Canada takes step toward allowing same-sex weddings

In the first step of a two-step process, Canada's Anglican Church voted to amend its rules to allow clergy to celebrate same-sex marriages.

The General Synod will vote again on the measure at its next gathering in 2019. If it passes, the Canadian church will join the Episcopal Church, which formally approved marriage ceremonies regardless of gender in 2015. As a consequence, the Anglican Communion placed temporary restrictions on the Episcopal Church.

At first it appeared that more than 200 delegates attending the General Synod meeting north of Toronto had voted to reject same-sex marriage by a single vote. It was later discovered that the electronic voting system had miscoded a vote. The revised tally showed that the measure passed.

To pass, the resolution required two-thirds support from each of the three orders, or bodies, within the church: laity, clergy, and bishops.

In 2004, the church affirmed the "integrity and sanctity of committed

adult same-sex relationships." A year later, the Canadian government legalized same-sex marriage.

Some bishops have said they will approve same-sex marriages, citing a ruling that the church's marriage canon does not explicitly prohibit them, said Matt Gardner, a church communications officer.

Archbishop Fred Hiltz, primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, told the *Anglican Journal* that he does not have authority over diocesan bishops in this matter.

Some bishops are "under huge pressure from their parishes and their clergy to proceed" with same-sex marriage, Hiltz told the *Anglican Journal*. "There is a part of me, I think, that would say, given their pastoral context, I understand where they are coming from."

At the same time, a group of bishops released a letter on July 15 expressing concern about protections for dioceses, clergy, and congregation that oppose same-sex marriage.

"We believe that our General Synod has erred grievously and we publicly dissent from this decision," they wrote. Passing the resolution "imperils our full communion within the Anglican Church of Canada and with Anglicans throughout the world." —Ron Csillag, Religion News Service; the CHRISTIAN CENTURY staff

Zanzibar historic cathedral restored, featuring center on slave-trade heritage

The land just outside the narrow streets and corridors of Stone Town, Zanzibar, where Christ Church Anglican Cathedral was built, was once a slave market. Now the church stands as a symbol of remembrance to the men, women, and children taken from East Africa and sold into slavery.

After a multiyear project by the Anglican Diocese of Zanzibar—part of the Anglican Church in Tanzania—to restore the cathedral, it will be rededicated later this year or in early 2017.

The cathedral, named a UNESCO

World Heritage Site in 2000, also recently opened a heritage center to commemorate the abolition of slavery and to educate people about slavery in its modern forms.

Bishop of Zanzibar Michael Hafidh, whose mother was a Christian and whose father was a Muslim, is especially pleased that the center is “accessible to school children, who are the country’s future leaders,” he wrote in an e-mail. “Telling the story of this dark chapter in the region’s history in an open and factual way will help bridge social and ethnic divides and promote tolerance, reconciliation, and an inclusive society.”

The heritage center will tell the story in English and Swahili of the slave trade in East Africa, beginning with the capture of slaves in places like the Congo, Kenya, and Tanganyika. It details how they worked on spice plantations and were sent abroad on ships from Zanzibar.

The center also describes the legacy that slavery imparted to Zanzibar, an island archipelago with 1.3 million people, 95 percent of them Muslim. Religious minorities include pagans and Hindus. Christians, who make up 2.5 to 3 percent of the population, include Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Pentecostals.

The history of the slave trade has been taught in Zanzibar in a way that blames Arabs, and Islam by association, wrote Nuhu Sallanya, director for Cultural Heritage Centre, in an e-mail.

“The truth is the slave trade in East Africa involved Arabs, Indians, Africans, and local leaders like chiefs,” he said.

Slavery in East Africa differed from the kind of large-scale plantation slavery in the United States, said Derek Peterson, professor of history and African studies at the University of Michigan and a member of St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in Ann Arbor.

“In East Africa slaves could also be artisans, they could be businessmen, they could go into jobs of their own and remit a portion of their profits to their owner,” he said. “But they could be very enterprising in their work.”

The heritage center in some ways seeks to set the record straight and promote reconciliation.

“Black Africans could and did be-



PHOTO BY LYNETTE WILSON/EPISCOPAL NEWS SERVICE

SLAVE ANCESTORS: *Christ Church Anglican Cathedral’s high altar marks the site where a whipping post once stood. Most Anglicans in Zanzibar today trace their roots to slaves who lived on the island, a history explored in a recently opened heritage center connected to the cathedral.*

come slave owners themselves by becoming Muslims,” Peterson said. “East Africa’s slave economy was a very complicated place in which there wasn’t a clearly defined slave-owning class and neither was there a clearly defined class of who were slaves.”

The slave trade shifted to East Africa after the British parliament ended the Atlantic slave trade in the early 1800s and later positioned navy squadrons off the coast to intercept slaving vessels headed for the New World, driving up the price for slaves, said Peterson. The demand for slave labor was high in the Caribbean and Brazil; the latter country didn’t abolish slavery until the late 19th century.

“Sometimes they were also sold in great numbers to dealers who took them around the Cape of Good Hope bound for Brazil,” Peterson said.

In addition to serving as a memorial to the slaves who were brought to the market, the cathedral also commemorates the work of Scottish explorer and missionary David Livingstone and his efforts to abolish the slave trade.

“The Anglican Church in Zanzibar grew out of a long campaign against the slave trade in East Africa inspired by the

rhetoric of David Livingstone,” Peterson said.

The dominant Anglican mission in Zanzibar was called the Universities Mission to Central Africa, due in part to abolitionist work at Oxford and Cambridge, marked by a famous speech in which Livingstone spoke about the degradation of the slave trade, Peterson said.

“Livingstone’s idealistic speech gives rise to a whole mission in UMCA, which is populated by enterprising high-minded Anglican students from Oxford and Cambridge and other British universities,” he said.

Following Livingstone’s speech in the 1870s, the UMCA was launched in Zanzibar and inland in what today is Malawi, where missionaries opened up stations to accommodate freed slaves, some of whom they purchased and others whom they rescued.

“They become the first congregations for Anglican missionaries to preach to and later they become important emissaries of Christianity to other parts of East Africa, and agents of the Anglican mission who preach and translate and work alongside British missionaries in the work of evangelism,” he said.

Anglicanism continued to grow slowly in Zanzibar until the revolution in 1964, when the sultan of Zanzibar was removed from power. The new government took over the Anglican mission’s headquarters as well as the schools and the hospital missionaries had built. The church moved its headquarters to the mainland of Tanzania, and the church’s other buildings on the island, including the cathedral, fell into disrepair, said James Kaleza, assistant diocesan secretary.

In the 1990s a change in government policy allowed the Diocese of Zanzibar to reassume its work on the island. “The diocese was reinaugurated in 2001.”

Today’s Anglicans in Zanzibar trace their roots to emancipated slaves, Kaleza said.

“Most of the Anglicans in Africa are descendants of slaves because their ancestors were those who were brought here to be sold and ended up at the mission,” Kaleza said. “They became the first Anglicans.” —Lynette Wilson, Episcopal News Service

People



■ Israeli security officials have charged **Mohammad El Halabi**, the operations manager in Gaza for World Vision, with funneling tens of millions of dollars in donations to Hamas's military wing.

According to the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, the Shin Bet contends that 60 percent of World Vision's Gaza operations were diverted to Hamas. World Vision, one of the world's largest Christian humanitarian aid organizations, said in a statement August 4 that it was "shocked" by the allegations and that "based on the information available to us at this time, we have no reason to believe that the allegations are true."

The Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security service, said in a statement that during interrogations over the past six weeks Halabi admitted to being a Hamas activist and using his position "to divert the humanitarian organization's funds and resources from the needy" to benefit Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip. The money went toward weapons, tunnels into Israel, a military base, and militants' salaries, according to the security agency.

World Vision, whose worldwide budget is close to \$3 billion, said the Gaza programs "have been subject to regular internal and independent audits, independent evaluations, and a broad range of internal controls aimed at ensuring that assets reach their intended beneficiaries and are used in compliance with applicable laws and donor requirements."

World Vision, which has provided assistance to Palestinian children for four decades, said it will "carefully review any evidence presented to us and will take appropriate actions based on that evidence. We continue to call for a fair legal process."

Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, president of Shurat HaDin, an Israeli legal rights institute that provides representation and resources for victims of terrorist attacks, said the charges against Halabi should come as no surprise to World Vision's leadership.

"For years we have been warning that World Vision is funding Palestinian terror groups in Gaza," she said. "World Vision has repeatedly denied our charges and refused to seriously investigate where its funds are going." —Michele Chabin, Religion News Service

■ **Duncan Montgomery Gray Jr.**, an Episcopal priest who took risky stands for integration and endured a beating for the cause, died at age 89 at his home in Jackson on July 15, according to the Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi.

He was a parish pastor from 1953 to 1974, and then Episcopal bishop of Mississippi until 1993, the diocese reported.

In addition to backing integration, Gray supported women in ordained ministry and worked for gender equality among laypeople serving on vestries and committees, according to the diocese.

Gary G. Yerkey, a journalist who has covered civil rights, wrote for the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* website about interviewing Gray, a fourth-generation Mississippian, in October 2015.

As a student in the early 1950s, Gray worked to reverse the ban on African Americans at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee.

"It just blows my mind when I stop and think about it, that the trustees of the University of the South behaved like they did," Gray said.

In 1962 Gray was rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Oxford, Mississippi. He lost half of his congregation, Yerkey wrote, after preaching that the seeds of "anger and hatred, bitterness and prejudice" were "widely sown," and that as Christians "we need to do our utmost to uproot and cast them out."

That year Gray spoke to white students who were rioting after the Uni-

versity of Mississippi admitted an African American, James Meredith. He tried to calm them while holding on to a statue at the entrance of Old Miss, but the crowd eventually pulled him down and beat him severely. Two others were killed.

Gray told Yerkey that Christians who supported segregation were essentially appealing to tradition.

"It's not hard for me to understand how they could be wedded to the past," Gray said. "They were sincere. They were not un-Christian . . . but they were just badly mistaken about segregation." —the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* staff

■ **Ibtihaj Muhammad**, a 30-year-old fencer, made history in Rio de Janeiro as the first U.S. Olympian to compete in a hijab.

Muhammad, who made *Time* magazine's 2016 list of the world's 100 most influential people, was a member of the 2014 world championship fencing team. At Rio, she was eliminated in her second bout in the women's sabre tournament on August 8.

Growing up in New Jersey, she was often harassed for wearing sweatpants and long-sleeved shirts beneath her volleyball, track, and tennis uniforms.

One day her mother saw a group of fencers, covered from head to toe as they practiced in the high school cafeteria. Beneath her headgear, her hijab would barely get a second look. "When you get to high school, you're doing it," Muhammad's mother told her.

She doesn't shy away from speaking up for the black and Muslim American communities. In March, she publicly commented about how a volunteer at the South by Southwest media and music festival demanded she remove her hijab to receive her ID badge.

"When a lot of people think of an Olympic athlete or an American Olympic athlete, they probably don't picture someone who looks like me," Muhammad said. "I love that I can be that image of change." —Aysha Khan, Religion News Service



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LIVING The Word

September 11, 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Exodus 32:7-14; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

A REMARKABLE feature of the Hebrew Bible is the freedom of the faithful to talk back to God. The psalmist can ask impatiently, “How long, O Lord?” Job can wish for his day in court, if only the divine judge and prosecutor would show up to hear him plead his case. Jeremiah can ask in no uncertain terms why he was seduced, abandoned, and made a laughing stock (20:7-12). Moses, with whom the Lord would speak face to face “as one speaks to a friend” (Exod. 33:11), can explode when the Lord’s chosen people refuse to eat their manna. And speaking of the people, Moses is quick to recall that they were entirely God’s brilliant idea, not his. He sputters and foams at the Almighty: “Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child,’ to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors?” (Num. 11:12).

In each of these cases, the Lord’s beloved has a legitimate complaint. At other times the tables are turned and God is the one who is exasperated and aggrieved. Because of the great outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah, for instance, let the cities of the plain be swept away! And yet here comes Abraham—by his own admission only “dust and ashes”—who worries that in this cataclysm, the righteous might be disposed of along with the wicked. Whereupon the bargaining begins, until the “Judge of all the earth” is persuaded by Abraham to be merciful (Gen. 19).

James calls Abraham a “friend of God” (2:23). In this week’s reading from Exodus, Moses presumes upon a similar divine friendship to offer God advice after the debacle of the golden calf. Tables are turned here: Moses is told that the errant Israelites are his responsibility, not God’s. All the Lord wants to do is wipe the slate clean—to let his wrath “burn hot against” the idolators, to destroy them and then start all over again with just Moses. With fire up his sleeve, let the “stiff-necked” truly be dust and ashes.

What is a mere mortal to say to this? Moses gives a reply in three stages, responding more like a judicious lawyer than keeper of a flock.

He begins by turning the Lord’s intention to destroy into a question: “Why would you want to consume with wrath the same people ‘you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand’?” The Israelites are, after all, God’s own. Second, why give the Egyptians any reason to doubt the divine intention behind the Exodus? Why save the people from the Red Sea only to kill them in the mountains? Finally,

Moses appeals to memory. God should look to the past, to the promises once made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the inheritance of descendants and land offered to them—and with all of that, a future as God’s people.

There is, in this divine-human back and forth, a greatly appealing intimacy. It suggests the possibility of an exchange with God that is something like what one would have with a friend—that God is someone to be approached frankly, not courted, as John Donne writes, “with flattering speeches”; someone who can take us up when we are at our wit’s end and to whom we, in turn, can offer the voice of reason.

On the other hand, who actually has such a relationship with God? And who can really imagine talking the Almighty out of a bad idea or urging divine mercy instead of judgment? Is this a God anyone could worship? Besides, mustn’t there have been someone at Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen who, like Moses in the wilderness, recalled to the Almighty the promises made to Abraham and his seed forever?

It is so much easier for Christians to think of God the way this week’s reading from 1 Timothy describes him, as “the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God [to whom] be honor and glory forever and ever.” Or even more, as the shepherd Jesus speaks of in the Luke reading, someone who “goes after the one that is lost until he finds it.” These texts give us someone to worship and to emulate, not someone who is missing in action (“how long, O Lord, how long?”) or willing to throw in the towel on us.

Marcion, of course, would have thrown in the towel on the entire Hebrew Bible—the Torah of Jesus and Paul—as well as on much of our New Testament. In the interest of an immortal and invisible God he would have us lose the problematic possibility of a mysterious friend who both comes close and stays far away, who shares our human nature and transcends our human understanding. Such a friendship does not preclude asking questions of the Lord; rather, it provokes them, forever and ever.

Those who ask do not stop; they keep talking. And so the psalmist alternates praise with lament while waiting on the Lord. After a long-silent God speaks from the whirlwind at great length but without a hint of explanation, Job says, “I had heard of you by hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you” (42:5). Jeremiah reaches such a point of frustration that he ponders vowing, “I will not mention him or speak anymore in his name”—yet he discovers that he cannot be silent. And Moses, at his death, blesses the Lord for the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, knowing that he will never enter the land he sees from the top of Mount Pisgah (Deut. 34:1-8).

To talk back means to keep talking. It’s what the friends of God do.

Reflections on the lectionary

September 18, 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

WHAT IS Jesus thinking when he tells the parable of the unjust steward?

This week's other readings pose no problems in understanding. The prophet Amos is clearly on message: there are people who exploit and trash the poor, who use clever business practices by manipulating weights and measures or simply steal from the impoverished "the sweepings of the wheat" they are allowed to glean from a harvested field. With them, God is not amused: "Surely I will never forget any of their deeds."

There is also no mistaking the psalmist, who reminds us that God cares for these gleaners who have been cheated: "He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap." Likewise 1 Timothy urges prayers and supplications on behalf of those in power precisely that they might ensure the well-being of those who are not, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity."

Then we come to the Gospel text, and we wonder what in the world the master storyteller has in mind in telling such a confusing tale.

A rich man catches his manager red-handed in malpractice. Call it squandering. As a result, the manager is told, "You're fired!" The crook then quickly comes to himself and considers his options, deciding that he's not going to soil his hands or tire himself with actual labor. Instead, he'll make deals with his boss's debtors to ingratiate himself into their good favor.

Do they owe the rich man for 100 jugs of oil? Then make it for 50. For 100 containers of wheat? Call it 80. No wonder he counts on being welcomed into homes all over town!

Everyone wins here except the rich man. The debtors get a break they had no reason to expect; the wily steward gets a group of people who now owe him a favor. Once merely the boss's agent, now he is lord bountiful. Instead of shame and disgrace, doors will open and drinks will be offered.

What, however, could possibly be the "good news" for the rich man, who has been shortchanged by the manager all along and now finds him cutting debts he is legitimately owed? None—and yet Jesus says that this man actually commends the crook who has been bilking him, "because he had acted shrewdly." Cheated twice, he smiles! Could it be that he simply takes in the moxie of his crooked underling and admires his enterprise and ingenuity, the art of his deal?

As if to rescue the parable for future preachers, Luke has

Jesus deliver a series of wisdom-like sayings that seem intended to sound "shrewd" in a godly way. Commentators struggle to make sense of them; with all due respect, I am utterly unconvinced that they do make sense. Jesus begins with an injunction to make friends with "dishonest wealth" (and with the children of this age who are so good at managing it) in order that when that wealth is gone, "they may welcome you into their eternal homes." Huh? The sayings conclude with the familiar injunction against trying to serve two masters, which cannot be done: "You cannot serve God and wealth." Agreed, but don't most of us try?

The wealthy get a bad rap in Luke, starting with Mary in her Magnificat. Jesus dispatches his disciples without provisions, warns them to be on guard against greed, enjoins them to lay up treasure in heaven rather than on earth (the domain of both thieves and moths). The exception to this rule is the father in the parable of the prodigal son, who seems to possess a great deal, including slaves who eat their fill in his home. And yet what we admire in his character is not his wealth but the freedom he has in giving things away: a robe ("the best one"), a ring, sandals, a fattened calf, and a feast.

But what if rather than trying to figure out what Jesus actually means in this week's parable, we took its interpretation to another level—to the kingdom of God that he is always pointing to?

One way to imagine this kingdom might be to gather together the biblical characters who animate this reading and those adjacent to it. There would of course be the rich man, his

What if the point of the parable is to welcome the shrewd and the faithful?

shady manager, and those several debtors who each got a lucky break; there would also be Dives, Lazarus, and Father Abraham from Luke 16:19–31, along with the two impossible brothers and their long-suffering father from Luke 15. Add to the mix the wheelers and dealers scorned by Amos, now no longer making the ephah small and the shekel great; then add the poor and needy who once hid themselves in the ash heap but are now, says the psalmist, sitting among the princely.

What if the point in the end is not to learn anything in particular but rather to extend a "welcome home" to the shrewd and the faithful alike, to everyone entrusted with those "true riches" that are the coin of God's realm?

Might that be what the kingdom of heaven is like? Might the angels rejoice?

The author is Peter S. Hawkins, professor of religion and literature at Yale Divinity School.

Farminary students get their hands dirty

Cultivating ministers

by Celeste Kennel-Shank

THE STUDENTS' ASSIGNMENT was to spend half an hour walking around the farm and observing things. They could inspect the pond and grassy spaces. They could look into the hoop house, where lettuce, spinach, kale, onions, parsnips, and carrots had sprouted. They could search for nests and cocoons in the trees and bushes, which were still wet from a heavy rain. The aim was to take the time to notice parts of the 21-acre farm they might otherwise overlook. It was an exercise in paying attention.

When the students reconvened, one of them showed the professor, Nathan Stucky, a photo she had taken. What was this cluster of spheres covered with red spikes, wondered Lindsay Clark. Was it something made by an insect? (Clark later looked it up and found that it was a fungus that affects apples and cedars.)

In small groups, the students shared what they had seen on their excursions. The information they gleaned was not as important as the experience of slowing down and just looking, without having to worry about being productive. The discussion ran to the importance of recognizing the value in what is, rather than focusing on a result, whether a crop yield or a test score. Stucky posed a question: "What if the role of the teacher is to help people become fully themselves?"

The discussion was part of a class at Princeton Theological Seminary called Scripture and Food. It took place on a spread of seminary-owned land that is home to a program dubbed the Farminary. The Farminary is the locus of an innovative project in theological education. Though food is grown at the farm, that's only part of happens there, and it's not the main point.

"The motivation here is the vitality of the church," said Stucky, who is director of the Farminary.

"We don't have this Farminary so that we can make a bunch of farmers. The point is a particular kind of formation for people who can go out and lead in churches and lead in the world." Stucky hopes the Farminary will help students learn about relationships, about the embodied nature of ministry, and about life and death.

"I'm suspicious of education and formation that does not take into account our best understanding of what it means to be human," he said. "We are embodied, social, relational, always-hungry-for-transcendence creatures. And our theological education, more so than any other education, should account for that. The farm helps us do that in a way that isn't opposed to the traditional classroom, but that might bring what happens in the classroom to life."

Princeton is not the only seminary engaged in sustainable agriculture. Many schools are partnering with congregations to address issues of food and justice. And Princeton isn't the only theological school that owns a farm. But it may be the first to create a theological curriculum in the context of a farm with the aim of shaping students for ministry.

Kenda Creasy Dean, professor of youth, church, and culture at the seminary and a member of the Farminary steering committee, sees the Farminary serving as a corrective of sorts. "Theological formation got co-opted by industrial models of education," she said. Dean described how in the early 20th-century Sunday school classes began reforming themselves to resemble public schools, which trained students the way factories trained workers. Teachers separated students into age groups, sat them down in chairs, and expected them to listen to the teacher.

"We inadvertently adopted a system designed for something very different than discipleship," she said. "If you're cultivating love—which is what discipleship boils down to—you're cultivating relationships." The traditional method of teaching focuses on giving the right answer and getting good grades, which fosters a sense of competition and fear of failure—all of which runs counter to the skills needed to form Christian community.

As Stucky puts it, "Innovation, creativity, successful farming, successful ministry—all depend on the ability to take risk, to endure failure, and to move on."

On the day I visited the Scripture and Food class, students spent six hours at the Farminary, alternating the time between discussion and physical activity. After the assignment on paying attention, the students turned to farmwork. Some planted seeds in trays, preparing to cultivate broccoli, radishes, and eggplants. Others watered plants in the hoop house. And some uprooted a cover crop and put the plants into the compost pile.

The course aims to teach students about agrarian thought and practice, and the reading list includes several selections from the works of Wendell Berry. But Stucky also wants students to think about how the practice of working the land might lead to insights for ministry and for teaching the faith. He wants students to think about how food is consumed, but also how scripture is consumed—and how the two activities might be related.



Photo by Jared Pataken

AGRARIAN RHYTHMS: Bridget Wendell (left) and Veronica Cotto Santa (right) harvest a spinach variety called Red Kitten.

The students gathered later in the barn, where they ate a potluck meal from food they had prepared themselves: soup, quinoa, watermelon. After the plates were cleared, they talked about their final projects. Each student had been asked to

The Farminary's aim is to teach sustainable ministry, not just sustainable farming.

come up with an educational plan for a congregation that built on the food and scripture biography of that congregation.

The discussions were in some ways like any seminary class, but the students seemed more at ease with each other and their teacher. They laughed more. They were less focused on proving they had done the readings—though they did infuse their reflections with references to themes in the assigned texts for the day, which included the story of manna in the wilderness in Exodus 16, a chapter from Norman Wirzba's *Food and Faith*, and Marge Piercy's poem "To be of use."

The discussions, the shared physical tasks of the farm, and the shared meals create a closeness among the students, said Clark, who had brought her specialty, a banoffee pie—banana and toffee—to the potluck. "This class has a bond that we just don't see in other classes."

Princeton bought the land that is now used by the

Farminary in 2010 simply as a way of diversifying its financial holdings, said Craig Barnes, Princeton's president. A few years later, when students were talking about sustainable agriculture and providing food for hungry people in Trenton, New Jersey, some faculty members and students raised the idea of the seminary purchasing a farm. Barnes looked into the matter and found out the seminary already owned one.

"All of these things were swirling around at the same time," he said. "It seemed like a Holy Ghost thing."

Barnes sees the Farminary as tapping into a desire for seminaries to have a voice on matters of public concern. "A lot of administrators like me are yearning to demonstrate the social relevancy of theological education," Barnes said. "Very few people are saying, 'Where are the theologians on this issue?' But they used to, back in the Reinhold Niebuhr days."

Such hopes and visions for the role of the seminary take place in the midst of a changing landscape for theological education. At Princeton, that reflection has included a desire to make the most of the fact that the seminary is rooted in a particular spot on the earth.

"Our connection to the land is not incidental, it's actually core to our identity as human beings," said Jacqueline Lapsley, associate professor of Old Testament, who is also on the steering committee. Lapsley pointed to the work of Bible scholar Ellen Davis of Duke Divinity School, who has stressed that much of the Hebrew Bible is rooted in agricultural life. "This is relentlessly agrarian literature," Lapsley said.

Lapsley has cotaught a class at the Farminary on Hebrew

Bible texts and interpretations. Students in the class read texts, worked on the farm, and discussed how their farm experience affected their view of the texts and how the texts affected their view of the farm.

She recalled a day that she had spent planting carrot seeds with the students. She thought about the reading from Genesis 2:15, which says that God put human beings in the garden to serve and preserve it. The word that's usually translated as *till* can also be translated as *serve*, she noted. She thought about what it means to serve the ground—how it requires sweat and holds the possibility of failure.

"The garden embodies everything we do in ministry," she said. "All of that was just incredibly concrete."

Lapsley is encouraging other Princeton professors to consider coteaching a course with Stucky at the farm. She finds Princeton faculty enthused about the Farminary. Meanwhile, some other scholars have worried that the Farminary courses will lack academic rigor. But, said Lapsley, "it's false to equate rigor with abstract theologizing."

The emphasis on the land has also elicited some worries that the Farminary is somehow encouraging ecopaganism.

Serving and preserving the ground does not mean worshipping it, Lapsley said. "A core piece of our vocation is to serve this earth so that it might be fruitful for everything that lives here," she said.

Dean also sees tending the soil as part of the Christian calling. Churches are recognizing this, as is evident in congregations' growing interest in gardening and sustainable farming. But congregations still need to learn how to describe what they're doing that's different from the rest of the world.

"Young people and young adults are just hurtling toward the American success narrative," Dean said. "It's just killing our young people." Teenagers attend SAT prep classes instead of youth groups, and churches struggle to tell a story that's different from that of the wider culture.

"I see the agricultural rhythms as standing over and against the consumerist patterns that dominate our culture," Dean said.

Classes at the Farminary strive to teach students how to create communities where people care for each other the way that gardeners tend a garden, nurturing life in places that appear inert.

Pregame ritual

Here in the basement of the *Espresso Royale*
on Sixth Street in this land grant university town,
amid English Fog lattes and keypad-clatter,
in the afternoon before the all-hallows-eve in which Katie,
a great-great-et-cetera granddaughter
of the townswoman they hanged for the crime
of witchcraft, will play a game—*homo ludens*—
of volleyball against the maize-and-blue Michigan Wolverines
I draft a missive to the good citizenry of Dorchester as though they might yet
happen upon these words,
as though their revived selves were a short gallop
from this latitude and longitude, as though their sins
of omission and commission might still be forgiven—
not just forgotten—by an act of penance that includes
a pilgrimage to tonight's venue and a maniacal cheering
for this descendent as she executes (I didn't invent the language)
a perfect play that culminates in (really, I didn't) a kill.
Full stop because
I don't know how to end this letter.
So I do what
I always do:
continue breaking
lines
and staggering
down the page until
it's time to witness
more volleyball and cheer like nothing
else ever happens or matters.

Bill Stadick

"It's easy to lose sight of the fact that ministry traffics, in life and death," Dean said. "If, at the end of the day, ministry is about anything less, we're wasting our time."

Knowing the rhythms of life and death is crucial not only because pastors will be ministering to the dying and performing funerals, but because they may well end up ministering to congregations that are closing their doors. "Probably a lot of us will be called to take over dying churches," said student Chris McNabb.

And in many congregations, people are dealing with death daily. Veronica Cotto Santa thinks of the youths she has known in Puerto Rico, who risk death for money and power. "By preaching only life, as we often do in our churches, are we teaching false religion?" she wondered. "We need to be aware that what we're preaching is worth living for and worth dying for."

Working with other students on a section of the farm, Jean Wilkinson, a clinical psychologist who serves as an elder in a congregation made up predominantly of Latino and Latina immigrants, reflected on how the image of a seed contains life and death. Sometimes parts of us have to die in order to make way for new ways of living, he said.

Wilkinson said he thinks about humans in their environments like plants in the soil. "You can't expect everything to grow the way you thought it would," he said.

"The garden embodies everything we do in ministry."

That is true for the Farminary itself, which is still testing its curriculum. Stucky said he has become more aware in the courses he's taught that issues of race have to be addressed.

"I am recognizing as I familiarize myself with the agricultural story of the church, the country, and world that those stories cannot be separated from the race story," Stucky said. "Our food system has always depended upon the marginalization and exploitation of people of color." One text Stucky has added to the syllabus is James Cone's essay "Whose Earth Is It Anyway?" which connects racism to the degradation of the earth.

Some people who hear about the Farminary think it is a Christian version of the trendy interest in local artisan food and in agrarian life. "We certainly have students who come with their romantic ideals about what our life on the land might look like," Stucky acknowledged. And the Farminary is interested in addressing issues of sustainability. One late-spring evening the farm hosted leaders from congregations that either have a gar-



Photo by Jared Flesher

SEEDS AND SOIL: Jean Wilkinson works in the hoop house.

den or are thinking about starting a garden. And this September the Farminary will host its second Just Food conference focused on issues of food justice, sustainable agriculture, food insecurity, and the profound ways people relate to food.


Through actions as simple as eating, "we're all tied to the land," Stucky said. "Are we aware of that? And then, from the particularity of the Christian tradition, are we aware of the theological perspectives that have been around for centuries and that have proclaimed that the connection between humans and humus literally leads us back to the Creator?"

"Feminists and marginalized peoples, as well as neuroscience, have been saying for some time that there are embodied ways of knowing," Stucky said. "It's actually really important that our intestines be involved in the educational process, that we wouldn't just cognitively make sense of things, but that it would descend into our guts and we would feel it."

The farm creates ways for seminarians to come face to face with death in a classroom setting through thinning seedlings or while tearing up a winter cover crop and adding it to the compost pile. At the same time, students also see resurrection, such as in how the decomposition of some plants yields fertility for others.

"To be an eater is to be a being dependent on death," Stucky said, "whether it's the carrot that we eat or the chicken that we eat."

The lives of the farmer, the land, the carrot, are all given so the others can flourish. Rather than getting bogged down in morbidity, Stucky hopes students will learn a greater reverence for all of life.

"Those sensitivities can all be nurtured at the farm in a way that students feel it in their intestines," he said. 

The indispensability of others

What Mary saw at Cana

by Michael J. Buckley, SJ

WHEN THE WINE gave out, the Gospel writer tells us, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "What is this to me and to you?" (John 2:3-4).

While in Florence studying Italian during the summer of 1973, I spent a good deal of time wondering and praying about this question: In what way are others essential to my relationship with God? In what way are they indispensably present? Other people are obviously crucially important and integral, irreplaceable. I spend most of my life with them and (hopefully) much of it for them. They enclose relationships of friendship, love, and wisdom that make up much of the richness of life. This seems obvious. But how are they absolutely essential and indispensable to my hope for a relationship with God—so much so that if they were not present, I would have no relationship with God at all? That is what I mean by "absolutely essential."

These puzzling, confused reflections were triggered by a foundational statement of Cardinal John Henry Newman, taken with its full force: that there are simply "two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator." But are others essential, that is, an absolutely necessary part of my conscious life with God, my affectivity, and my actions—so much so that if they were not somehow or other consciously present I would have no relationship with God, or for that matter, with myself? This question forms the context in which I hear and understand the question that Jesus asks of Mary at Cana: "What is this to me and to you?" It asks how we include essentially within our lives those who we might otherwise forget as we go about the business of our lives.

The dialectical form of the question realizes a Semitic idiom. It asks: Do we have something in common between us here? It probes: What business is that of ours? Or perhaps: How does that involve *me*—and not just you? Or, as in this question: How are *we* involved? This interrogation calls into question whether there is any common concern here or even a common passion in which we are united, in which we come together into a "we." What is here to unite us in a common concern, a single identity in a care that we share? Why are we involved? How is this a concern of me and you?

Jesus's question looks like a refusal, but that view is deceptive. It is easily noted that no request has been made. Mary simply comments, the way anyone might, that the wine is gone. There is no directive, no command. No request is made of her son. The mother appropriates the shattering embarrassment,

the pain of others, and represents it to Jesus. But he reads much more than that into her comment. Jesus transforms her remark and takes it as if it were a request. He then meets a request that has not been made with what seems to be its refusal. He refers to Mary, his mother, as "woman"—the way "woman" would appear in John 19 before the cross, and in the sign that appears in the heavens in Revelation 12. "Woman" transposes the symbolic significance of this interchange into what it is to become for all times and all places. Mary becomes the symbol of the entire church.

Jesus' question reverberates for us: "What is this to me and to you?"

Mary ignores the refusal that seems to have been made of a request that had not been put. Then she carries this interchange one level deeper, ignoring the surface meaning of what Jesus had just said. In Rudolf Bultmann's words: "The mother has understood her son: all she can do now is to await the miracle worker. So she directs the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them."

Mary comments—and Jesus understands what is beneath. Jesus questions Mary—and she discerns the actual depth and meaning informing the seeming denial. She understands that this concern touches him so much that she can direct the servers to a more general openness and availability: "Do whatever he commands you." Why did she have to say that? Would the narrative not have found them obeying Jesus without this directive? The Gospel discloses that the servants did what they did at the direction of Mary. This fact seems to be strongly paradigmatic of her continual influence within the church.

In fact, are there not times in the history of the church in which the influence of Mary has made the influence of Jesus both present and directive in a way it otherwise would not have been?

*Michael J. Buckley, SJ, is a theologian and former president of the Catholic Theological Society of North America. This essay is adapted from his book *What Do You Seek? The Questions of Jesus as Challenge and Promise*. © 2016 by Michael J. Buckley, SJ. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.*

In the Guadalupe culture of Mexico? In the piety of 19th-century France? In the ordinary piety and understanding of Catholics for centuries when the liturgy was in Latin, translations forbidden, the Eucharist at a great distance and seldom received, and much of the clergy lost in class isolation? Is it not simply a palpable fact that the presence of Mary and the historic identification of Mary with the poor and the unlettered gave them a unique and powerful access to Jesus, and that her symbolic, unrealized presence and influence within the church kept them Catholic in a deeper sense than may have met a theologian's eye? Here is the mystery and source of authentic Marian piety: Mary giving birth to Jesus, her endless service to the church.

For this question of Jesus continues through history to stand before his mother, and in her, to stand before the church: "How are we involved in the needs of these people?" It is of great importance to the life and mission of the church that we hear this question. For it has been and is shockingly easy not to see human social misery or to take it for granted as part of the intractable social situation. Examples abound even in the lives of men and women great in sophisticated theological knowledge and heroic in sanctity.

The only time, as I recall, that the factories of Birmingham in the 19th century—where women and small children were working 12 hours a day in wretched conditions—figured in

Newman's diaries and writings was in the record he made of his visit to one of them very late in his life. His visit was meant to ensure that the Catholic women would be allowed to attend mass and that the Christian instruction for Catholics would be within the creed. Amid the terrible poverty that suffused Birmingham, he makes note of nothing else.

And what of the great Baron von Hügel—one of the supreme masters of spiritual theology in the 20th century? Von Hügel scholar James Kelly discovered a report that the baron allowed his servants to live in squalor.

Newman was not indifferent to the poor; indeed, he worked among them for years. Nor did Baron von Hügel consciously exploit his servants. These theologians simply did not see the social need and class poverty for what they were. Social structures and widespread poverty with its sufferings were simply taken for granted. Such social myopia threatens all human beings. Even the greatest men and women have profound class limitations. This demonstrates the serious and continual need for the question Jesus put to Mary. It calls all human beings into painful judgment. The church, the local Christian community, its theologians—Jesus' question calls them also into judgment. In every aspect of life, one can hear the searing question to Mary: "What is this to me and to you?"

Christians have heard this text so many times and in so many ways that it can be dulled by its repetition if it is not

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searchingly applied. This Gospel is to be insistently proclaimed year after year within the church, so that Christians might come to see what they do not adequately see and to feel what they do not adequately feel, so that the question would touch, even shape, their understanding of what God through the Spirit is calling them to. The church is summoned by God never to forget, in its array of talents, promises, and temporal successes, the suffering of the marginalized. The question to Mary is essential to this call. The question, in its own haunting way, surmounts the banality of repetition and offers to those who can hear it the meaning of Christian life. That is the reason why the social doctrine of the church can be far more radical than that of either American political party.

Leaders in and outside the church can be so isolated that they become incapable of hearing this call in any demanding way, in a way that would cause a revolution in their own appropriation of reality. Isolated from such insecurity and pain, a priest can easily find himself unconsciously alienated from the lived experience, the searching anxieties, and the poignant needs of the very poor. A closed clerical subculture can develop, and has developed, within the church. A priest can see the migrant workers bent over in the fields in California as he drives by on the highway. The priest can see it—he can even reflect on it—but it may not impinge upon his life or tear at his sensibilities; it may not form the stuff of his examination of conscience, of what he spontaneously represents before God. He can become more a spectator than a participant in these lives, in their misery. He neither suffers their lot nor experiences their need. He may only regret it. And this distance is destroying the church.

At the Y

Iris, at 92, is more bird
than flower, more wings
flapping than bloom
unfolding. She is not still

life, not slow motion,
but mid-flight and atwitter,
elbows and knees
in awkward poses, fragile
neck gawked in the lovely
way of a small crane
or a young duck.

Only her lavender
pants suggest a plant,
a blossom of early spring—oh,
and the way she looks
toward the sun, stretches
as our instructor tells her to,
her back a tender stalk.

Mary M. Brown

What is necessary is lived experience—not privations calculated at a distance. Instead of having a common ground, a common concern that unites Christians with Christ in the very poor, leaders may move away from it. In their emotional indifference, they simply don't get it. The effect of this ignorance and indifference has been the destruction of much of the church as an effective agent within the world. If, unlike Mary, church leaders do not appropriate with some depth of experience and passion the needs of others, they become less and less those who can even hear the question contained within the human situation addressed to them, less and less those who can turn to the Lord with any experienced poignancy and say: "They have no wine." The statement has become insistently a question about life itself.

One has only to raise one's eyes to see this poverty and suffering. Those parents who watch their children grow up without education, without much hope for a better life; the migrants who shift with the crops in the Southwest, knowing bitterly that their children are condemned to repeat the lives of their parents—"They have no wine." The millions of aged, hidden away in our cities or in dreadful convalescent homes, who with very little must eke out lives of threat, worry, and terror on minimal subsistence—"They have no wine." The despised or feared or uneducated men and women, especially the poor in the inner cities whose lives are terrorized by the violence on their streets and the hopelessness of ever getting enough education or capital to escape—"They have no wine." The debtor nations, attempting to pay off their debts by progressively and unconscionably lowering the living standards of the poor—"They have no wine." Women demeaned and threatened by violence and their disproportionate level of financial insecurity, patronized and discriminated against at the highest levels of decision making even within the church, and by their level of poverty in the world—"They have no wine."

In all this misery, the question Jesus asks turns Christians back to themselves: "What is this to me and to you?" What is this world of endless sorrow to us? How should it shape our lives?

Christians become more Christian as they realize in themselves the mysterious promise that is the church—and what it means to become church. The church, in its turn, becomes more itself the more it realizes the call of the mother of God in her appropriation of the pain and sorrow of others. This may be the embarrassment of a wedding couple, or the pain of her son at his death, or the hidden church praying for the Spirit that would give it insight and courage. The church becomes more the church as the pain of the human race comes more and more into its consciousness and into its effective action, its experience and understanding and affectivity—as the condition of human beings gets a stronger purchase on the lives of Christians.

For others are absolutely essential to one's union with God. Without the love of others, there would be no Christian relationship to God. Here is where one becomes capable of responding to the question of Jesus: "What is this to me and to you?" Wisely Thomas Aquinas insisted that the love of charity

in which we love God is the same capacity of charity by which we love other human beings. It is in charity that one becomes capable of responding fully to Jesus.

In 1944, when Roger Schütz wanted to form his ecumenical monastic community, he decided to locate it in one of the most de-Christianized sections of France. And so he chose Taizé in Burgundy, in the neighborhood of what had for centuries been the greatest and most extensive monastery in Europe, the Abbey of Cluny. It is not strange, although it is paradoxical, that this was the neighborhood that he lighted upon. For the most de-Christianized places in France are the sites of what were once the wealthiest and most powerful monasteries in France. I once mentioned this curious fact to Cardinal Godfried Danneels, the former primate of Belgium. His response: "Of course, you will find exactly the same situation in Belgium." If one looks over the social and religious history of Italy, one will find that the most extensively communist areas are in what had been the Papal States.

Why is this the case, all Christians must ask themselves—why so often was the legacy of centuries of establishment, of institutional productivity and security and great religious art, frequently a profound alienation and de-Christianization? Why is there a cultural absence of God where those very institutions that should have ministered to God's presence were so powerful? And to be more concrete and particular, does one find anything similar in the United States—a powerful presence but a growing

disbelief, alienation, disgust, and distance? Part of the reason may well be that very power and wealth. Perhaps it's because local churches and large Christian communities that possessed, for whatever reasons, political power and extensive holdings became strangers to the massive social inequity and outrageous poverty and humiliation of so many, and came to accept comfortably a social structure that was impoverishing and unjust. Did they inevitably come to trust in the status quo, no matter how unjust, to feel secure in the presence of what they had, and to fall under the terrible condemnation of the prophet?

Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord. They shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when relief comes.

They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. (Jer. 17:5-6)

Among the many stories of St. Francis of Assisi, one in particular bears on this lesson. The story goes that Francis was being shown the Lateran Palace by Pope Innocent III, and the vision was one of splendor. The pope is reported to have said, "It is the same Church, but we can no longer say with the apostle Peter: 'Gold and silver I have not.'" To which Francis answered, "Nor do you have the power to say, 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk'" (see Acts 3:1-7).

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Just war rules demand accountability

Drones unlimited?

by Bradley B. Burroughs

IN A MOVE that appeared carefully calculated to tamp down criticism while escaping further scrutiny, the Obama administration in July released a report on the aerial drone strikes that have occurred outside “areas of active hostilities” between January 2009 and December 2015. In other words, the report tallied the number of drone attacks and resultant deaths in places other than Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

Assessing the justice of any given war or act of war, including drone strikes, depends upon the framework used. The core of the just war tradition is that acts of violence can be justified if they meet certain criteria, such as that they are used for a just cause and by a lawful authority. Among the standard just war criteria is that the use of violence must be “discriminate,” that is, it must distinguish between combatants and noncombatants and target only the former.

If one were to judge solely from the summary offered by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence—which recorded 473 drone strikes resulting in somewhere between 2,371 and 2,581 combatant casualties and from 64 to 116 civilian casualties—the drone program might appear to be performing adequately. As the report acknowledges, however, this estimate of civilian casualties is well below even the most conservative estimates of outside observers.

The three major independent organizations that track civilian casualties—Long War Journal, New America, and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism—estimate the number of civilian casualties to fall between 212 and 801. Hence noncombatant deaths may be as low as 2.4 percent of those killed in drone strikes, taking the government’s most favorable figures, or as high as 29 percent, using the highest BIJ estimates.

The July 1 ODNI report marks the first time any administration has shared official data on casualties from drone strikes. Yet it provides merely three data points—the total number of strikes against terrorist targets outside areas of active hostilities, the estimated number of combatant deaths, and the estimated number of noncombatant deaths. Given in aggregate, the data provide little to verify the report’s claims. Identities, dates, locations, and even the number of strikes per country or per year are not given. As a result, the report does not succeed—as the accompanying White House Fact Sheet claims it does—in “demonstrating the legitimacy of our counterterrorism efforts” and showing that “rigorous standards . . .

have resulted in extraordinarily precise targeting.” Instead of proving such claims, it merely asserts them.

And there are good reasons to harbor skepticism of the ODNI totals. A variety of sources, including some originating within the military, suggest that drone casualties are routinely reckoned in ways that underrate the number of noncombatants killed.

Last October, *The Intercept*, an online journal dedicated to publishing previously classified materials, released a cache of secret and top-secret documents originally produced for a 2013 Pentagon study assessing the use and effectiveness of aerial drones. Among these was an analysis of Operation Haymaker, a 2011–13 campaign against militants in Afghanistan that was jointly conducted by the military and the CIA. The analysis noted that of the 155 persons killed in aerial strikes, the vast majority of which were initiated from aerial drones, 136 were not the intended targets of the strike. Yet every one of those nontargeted persons was labeled “EKIA,” enemy killed in action.

A tautological assumption appears to influence the calculation of casualties: in most cases being killed by an aerial drone seems sufficient to establish one’s identity as an “enemy” in the eyes of those counting casualties. As the source who leaked these documents to *The Intercept* said in an interview, “If there is no evidence that proves a person killed in a strike was either not a MAM [military-age male], or was a MAM but not an unlawful enemy combatant, then there is no question. They label them EKIA.” Numerous treatments of drone warfare—especially Chris Woods’s *Sudden Justice* and reports by Jonathan Landay for McClatchy newspapers—suggest the prevalence of such an assumption throughout the drone warfare complex.

So does use of drones meet the just war criterion of discrimination? In part, that depends upon how one defines discrimination. Most frequently, it is understood to forbid the *intentional* killing of noncombatants. If we interpret intent in a solely subjective fashion to refer to the design present in the actor’s mind, then evidence about the numbers of civilian casualties seems almost irrelevant. Yes, we should worry about the reported callousness of drone operators.

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A rendering of an unmanned aerial vehicle (Photo © DigitalStorm)

According to Air Force Staff Sergeant Michael Haas, a former drone instructor, drone operators commonly refer to children as “fun-sized terrorists” and liken the killing of targets to “mowing the grass.” But so long as individual opera-

Being killed in a drone strike seems enough to establish one’s identity as an enemy.

tors seek only to kill combatants and have no malicious intent as they loose their bombs, they would satisfy the criterion of discrimination under this interpretation.

But understanding intention demands a more sophisticated account that considers objective and systemic considerations. In the case of drone strikes, such attacks are part of a system plagued by challenges that make it nearly impossible to eliminate civilian casualties. Prominent among these are the problem of “latency,” the time it takes for information to be conveyed from the drone to the operator—who is generally in the United States—and back; the fact that the drone program relies heavily upon tracking mobile phones and other forms of signals intelligence, which is, in the words of former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency Michael Flynn, “an easy system to fool”; the limitations of identifying targets given current technology; and what the Pentagon report calls the “tyranny of distance,” which creates lapses in observing potential targets.

To be sure, there is no simple numerical line that defines what constitutes discriminating use of force. Nevertheless, if it is indeed the case that nearly three out of every ten persons

killed by drone strikes are noncombatants, as the highest estimates indicate, then civilian casualties are so common as to be inseparable from the intention of the drone program. Even if the drone operators and those who authorize their actions have the purest designs, the objective intention toward which the program is oriented would include such a high proportion of civilian casualties that their subjective designs are secondary.

To draw an analogy: the driver who knowingly takes the wheel while severely intoxicated may not intend subjectively to harm others but only to reach a particular destination; nevertheless, the objective facts about the human body’s response to alcohol make driving in such a state objectively pernicious. In the case of drone warfare, if civilian deaths are remarkably common and the technology indiscriminate, employing such weapons is at least criminally reckless, and perhaps murderous. Such possibilities—which would render drone warfare, at least in its current form, unjustifiable for just war Christians—underscore the need for greater transparency.

To this point, we’ve assumed that drone strikes are carried out within the context of war. However, the ODNI report covers strikes outside of “areas of active hostilities,” which is to say beyond the bounds of a declared war, which raises further questions.

Determining what constitutes a war is less straightforward than one might imagine. Despite military interventions in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq (twice), Afghanistan, and elsewhere, Congress has not officially declared war since World War II. It has empowered such campaigns through less formal means, such as the Authorization for the Use of Military Force of 2001. In certain cases, these authorizations serve as the equivalent of a declaration of war.

For instance, the AUMF of 2001 enabled the president to

“use all necessary and appropriate force” against those responsible for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Combined with the Bush administration’s repeated identification of the Taliban as a primary contributor to those attacks, the United States rather clearly situated itself in a state of war with Afghanistan.

But beyond “areas of active hostilities”—in places like Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, for example—matters are considerably murkier. Unlike the conflict in Afghanistan, the United States has not clearly situated itself in a state of war with such nations, in no small part because it is generally supporting their established regimes against nonstate groups within them. The 2013 Pentagon study attested to the complexity of such cases when it observed that its operations in Yemen and Somalia occurred outside a “defined area of active armed conflict,” which limited the activities it could permissibly undertake.

Legally speaking, what activities are permitted depends upon the framework under which they are pursued. If drone strikes in these areas are indeed part of a war, a framework the Obama administration has been reluctant to adopt officially, then they are subject to the law of armed conflict; if not, then they must meet the more stringent criteria of human rights law, which permits force only as a last resort to prevent imminent harm to human life.

While the Presidential Policy Guidance issued by the

Obama administration in 2013 would satisfy either, whether the actual regimen of drone strikes meets the standards of human rights law depends a great deal upon the particulars of these strikes and resultant civilian deaths. This reinforces the need for increased transparency and presses for specification of the precise relationship between the United States and these nations, or particular groups within them, that would authorize the use of force by the United States.

Is the United States a self-appointed global police officer? To whom is it accountable?

If drone strikes are regarded as a form of law enforcement carried out under human rights law, the United States needs to establish that it is acting in that capacity. Law enforcement officers carry badges as a sign of their vested authority; to the extent that it does not make a public case as to why it ought to possess authority in these places, the United States risks appearing to be a self-appointed deputy or even a vigilante. Similarly, law enforcement officers are situated in systems that hold them accountable for the violence they do deploy. To

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establish itself as acting in the capacity of law enforcement, the United States would need to clarify the forms of accountability that should apply to drone strikes.

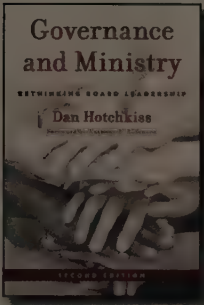
If, on the other hand, drone strikes are being carried out under the framework of war, declaring war is vital to meeting just war standards. Among these are the criteria of just cause and right intention. According to such standards, war can only be undertaken for legitimate goals, most of all to right an egregious wrong and thereby to restore peace. When combined with the criterion of last resort, which dictates that violence is permissible only when non-violent means prove incapable of establishing peace, these criteria require the enumeration of wrongs suffered, stipulation of terms necessary to restore peace, and provision of a time frame within which one's potential enemy may comply before nonbelligerent means will be judged ineffectual.

In short, these criteria call for something like a declaration of war, even if it comes in the form of an AUMF. Without such a declaration, drone strikes are part of a war without clear aims and thus one that threatens to be without limits and without end.

The ODNI report says that statistics on drone strikes and casualties are to be provided on a yearly basis—indicating that we should expect more of them. More frequent revelation of such information marks a step toward greater transparency, but it also points us to a future in which aerial drones continue to be a pivotal, and increasingly institutionalized, part of American foreign policy.

At their heart, the just war criteria seek to limit the violent use of force and to ensure respect for human life by placing restraints on who can be killed and under what circumstances. In aerial drone strikes, we confront a form of violence that threatens to escape beyond such bounds, portending a terrifying new world. **CC**

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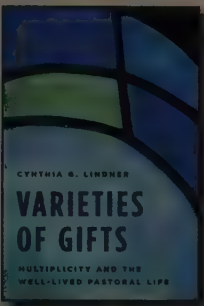
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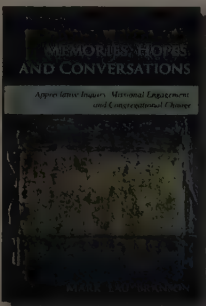
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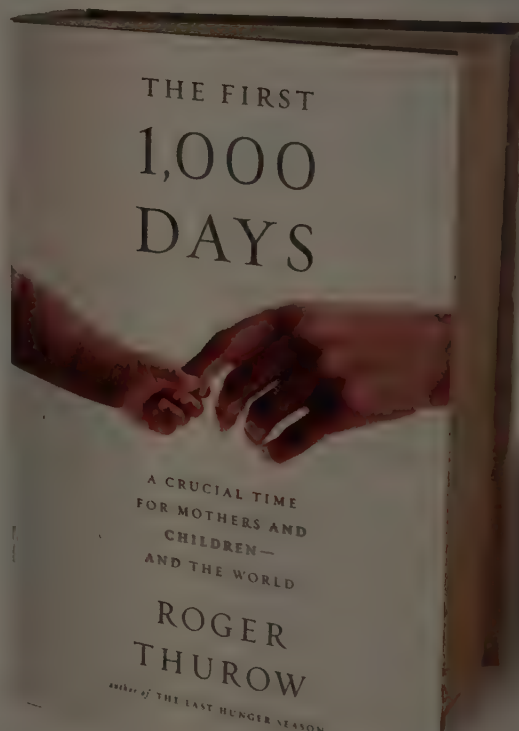
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Roger Thurow is a Senior Fellow for Global Agriculture and Food Policy at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. He was a reporter at the *Wall Street Journal* for 30 years.



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Faith MATTERS

by Stephanie Paulsell

Politics into poetry

THERE'S NOTHING like a long campaign season to weaken our faith in language. Transformative political speech is so rare that we weep to hear it—as many did when Michelle Obama spoke at the Democratic National Convention. Her account of waking up in a house built by slaves and watching her daughters play outside on the White House lawn was unforgettable. It left an image in our minds that has the potential to change us by reshaping our perspective.

Much of what we hear during political campaigns does not stir our imaginations. At best, many of the phrases we hear lack potency, and at worst, they leave our ears ringing with a high-pitched whistle meant to awaken old fears and hatreds. Unkeepable campaign promises tilt into magical thinking: “I alone can fix this.” The words are as empty as soap bubbles, but they have real consequences.

As we move into the campaigns’ last months, we need an antidote to the weightless, reckless words crowding the atmosphere. The beach books of summer, with their solvable mysteries, won’t do. We need language that anchors us in more difficult mysteries.

If you’re looking for a book to replenish your political and spiritual imagination, I recommend *Collected Poems 1950–2012*, by Adrienne Rich, with an introduction by poet Claudia Rankine. At more than 1,100 pages, this is a book that can accompany you to Election Day and beyond.

Rich, who died in 2012, published her first poems during the Truman administration and her last during the presidency of Barack Obama. Her body of work stretches from the Korean War to the war on terror, from her marriage to economist Alfred Conrad through her partnership with Jamaican-American writer Michelle Cliff. She was a poet when Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Kennedy brothers were murdered, and she wrote her last published poems shortly before 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed. To read from one end of her collected poems to the other is to experience history with someone whose engaged imagination not only longed for change but worked for it.

Start your morning with a few of her early poems; her rhymes and rhythms will echo in your mind all day and suggest your own thoughts and questions. Her early poetry is marked by a mastery of traditional poetic forms and her conviction that form offers us a way to bear our sorrows and our desires together.

As she made her way as a poet, woman, mother, lesbian, and activist, she began to write in freer, more open forms. She

looked for a “liberative language” that could assemble the fragments of experience and bring us into communion with “others like and unlike ourselves.” As she cultivated new forms, she also opened her poetry to new subject matter: the violence of poverty, of war, of language itself; the body as the place where change is born; the power of intimacy to undo and remake us; the radical possibilities of love and friendship. Her friendships with Audre Lorde, June Jordan, and other African-American writers made her question the seductive and destructive power of white American dreams of innocence. Over and over, in poem after poem, she asked, “How do we keep from dreaming the old dreams?”

How indeed? The old dreams rise up in new guises, cloaked in false promises and dangerous explanations for the problems we face. For Rich, writing poetry was a way to resist being beguiled by the old dreams. Poetry required everything of her, and she offered everything she had: her poems brim with her reading and loving, her anger and sorrow, her struggles and the struggles of others. Rankine describes the collection as “a chronicle of over a half century of what it means to risk the self in order to give the self.”

A poet's vocation sheds some light on the religious vocation.

As Rankine suggests, there's a lot to learn from Rich's poetic vocation about the religious vocation. Her devotion to her art was a spiritual exercise, keeping her awake and alert, drawing her deeper and deeper into the life of the world, creating in her a rare capacity for solidarity. As she changed, her forms changed, making more and more room for voices that had not been heard and experiences that had not been made into poetry in the traditions of her poetic inheritance. As she filled poetry with new possibilities, she also felt along its edges for its limits. She knew that “language cannot do everything.” But as she wrote her way through half of the last century and the early years of this one, she sought among “the damage that was done” and “the treasures that prevail” for a language that could lead us into new ways of living. Her poems are a challenge, a blessing, and an urgent alarm.

Stephanie Paulsell teaches practice of ministry studies at Harvard Divinity School.

IN Review

Know the world, know yourself

by Isaac S. Villegas

I follow Jedediah Purdy on Instagram. His pictures give the impression that he's in love. There's a shot of willow oak branches, the leaves orange in the sunset light. There's a portrait of the sky as a reflection on a pond, with ripples encircling a clump of bur-reeds. There are countless pictures, almost daily, of leaves—on a sidewalk, on the road, in his hand, floating in a puddle. My favorite picture is a selfie with Purdy bowed down on concrete, his body bent, his head turned to the sky and camera, so his bearded face can be a canvas for a splash of color from a rainbow.

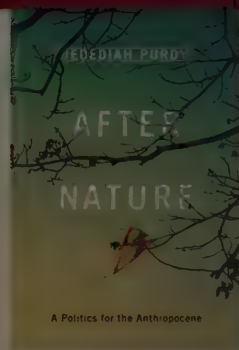
To scroll through Purdy's Instagram feed reminds me of what it was like in high school to collect photo booth strips, folded in a wallet, of a boyfriend or girlfriend. There's affection. There's devotion. There's romance. Purdy loves nature; he loves the earth. He can't help posting his snapshots, to show us his love.

In *After Nature*, Purdy explores the "styles of environmental imagination" in the United States that inform our relationships with the earth in this era that is called the Anthropocene, the age of humans. He traces the development of these ideologies through varied sources—from the colonial journals of John Winthrop to recent rulings by the Supreme Court, with an assortment of material in between. Purdy's brilliance is his ability to track conversations over time, to hear how one voice informs another, coalescing into a collective sensibility. He studies how an argument develops as one generation passes it along to the next, and he invites us to listen for how we reconfigure old ideas to make sense of our new world. To make sense of our world—that's what fuels

Purdy's writing. To guide our sense of perception of the nature that infuses us. When he describes the credo of the Hudson River School of landscape artists in the 19th century, he might be describing himself: "The key was to learn to see, because seeing was not mere surface perception—it was insight. . . . The most successful painting would be true to vision, and would train the gaze of others."

In this sense, to read Purdy's book is a lot like scrolling through his Instagram posts: each chapter, each picture, is a window of insight to help us gaze at this world that he loves—without jealousy, because he wants us to love it, too. And Purdy is quick to add that knowing and loving the earth involves turning toward ourselves and giving an account of who we are. He follows Ralph Waldo Emerson's axiom: "Know the world to know yourself." To look inside ourselves is to see the world, and to see the world is to get a glimpse of ourselves. On Emerson he writes: "One considered the whole universe to illumine the self."

This line of thought doesn't lead to a narcissistic encounter with nature, as if the only reason we had for caring about the earth were a fascination with ourselves. Instead Purdy explores the ideas that shape our imagination in order to inspire our environmental politics. "The ideas about nature, God, and politics that we have been tracing were not just debaters' topics or poetic decoration," Purdy explains, paraphrasing Max Weber: "Ideas are not generally the engines of history, but they are its switchmen." The conditions of our planet are bad enough that Purdy is looking for levers to pull us into a different future. "At inflection points, [ideas] can



After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene

By Jedediah Purdy

Harvard University Press, 336 pp., \$29.95

bank events off at one angle or another, with big consequences as time hurtles forward."

One significant inflection point in this book is Henry David Thoreau, whose ideas about nature infuse our contemporary discussions. Thoreau wove the human self into the surrounding nature, all becoming part of the same fabric of life, "self-knowledge depend[ing] on connection to the natural world." Romantic environmentalism claimed Thoreau as its prophet. For John Muir and his Sierra Club, the wilderness offered a multitude of experiences that were likened to Thoreau's Walden. "The Sierra Club's founders made Thoreau's use of nature as a pilgrimage site the basis for a new movement and a new form of sociability."

Purdy explains how the Romantics developed a politics of preservation to set apart land for camping and hiking public territory protected from industry and population growth. While this version of environmental imagination preserved swaths of North American landscape, it also habituated the public into "segregating the natural world into a few cathedrals and vast tracts of profane land, with most of human life relegated to the profane regions." In contrast to the Romantics' reading of Thoreau as a transcendentalist who invited his readers

Isaac S. Villegas is pastor of Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship and member of the governing board of the North Carolina Council of Churches.

to experience majestic epiphanies while on vacation in pristine nature, Purdy offers a Thoreau whose “ecological mysticism” inspires us as “natural creatures” to make a habitable world for all.

Purdy reads *Walden* as literature for the Anthropocene when he notes that Thoreau’s pond is not unspoiled nature, free from human contamination, but “a ruptured place.” Thoreau writes: “The wood-cutters, and the railroad, and I myself have profaned Walden.” Nature reveals itself as ruptured, as already profaned. To rest into a landscape is to be drawn into an adulterated history. “To come to the pond is already to profane it,” Purdy writes, “to think of nature, let alone act on it, is to make it a joint product of human and natural activity.” Thoreau for the Anthropocene confronts us with the reality that “profanation is simply the condition of the world,” an uneasy world where we work to undo the effects of our pollution and struggle to create habitable conditions for life. “The Anthropocene is a call to take responsibility for what we make, as well as for what we destroy.”

While Christianity isn’t a focus of Purdy’s research, he does account for foundational theologies that have informed American environmental imagination. For example, John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, claimed “God’s special providence” for the European colonists who settled in North America. Winthrop and the colonists believed that God’s will was self-evident from nature—that the land itself offered God’s invitation for them to take and eat, a garden for them to cultivate, their own paradise. Providence, in secularized form, informs a popular tendency to use whatever is at hand regardless of the damage we cause, trusting that God or fate or luck will assure a future for human life generation after generation, despite our ecological neglect. However, Purdy writes, “no providence is overseeing our burning through the planet’s storehouses of energy and fertility—for they were not crafted as storehouses at all.” Instead Purdy wants “democratic responsibility,” where we make a world together, a home for all of

A video on Purdy’s Instagram shows

a flock of chimney swifts, hundreds of birds swarming around an abandoned tobacco warehouse, then pouring themselves down into a smokestack. The building is a relic of an irresponsible past—nature damaged, human pollution, industrialism’s ruins. Yet Purdy notices the fragile beauty, a moment of Thoreauvian ecological mysticism, where we treasure the “places that are irremediably damaged” and learn “to prize what is neither pure nor natural, but just is—the always imperfect joint product of human powers and the natural world.” Everyday sites, profaned nature, reveal the beauty of this world. This is what Purdy imagines as an “aesthetics of damage, a way of living with harm and not disowning the place that is harmed, [which becomes] its own version of beauty.”

When I watch the chimney swifts I remember the words of Jesus: “Blessed are your eyes, for they see.” Purdy’s book invites us to see what he sees, to hear what he hears—to feel our way into an Anthropocene politics rooted in love for this world, our nature. This love is not delusional, whereby we hide ourselves from our impurity or from our damaged world. It is openness to who and where we are, love in the image of “the hand poised, extended in greeting or in an offer of peace.” This book is Purdy in love, an extension of his hands, opened to us and inviting us to share his experience of this natural yet profaned life that is our home.

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Fortune Smiles: Stories

By Adam Johnson

Random House, 320 pp., \$27.00

One of the things that delighted and confounded me about Adam Johnson's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Orphan Master's Son*, was its strange combination of the real and the unreal. On the surface I appeared to be reading a realist novel about North Korea. But almost immediately, something in the language clued me in that this was also a dystopian fantasy along the lines of George Orwell. Propaganda and "real life" were twisted together into a rope to which readers were asked to cling. Johnson gave me some perception of what it might be like for the people of North Korea to live amidst such fiercely controlling messages from the Dear Leader, but the book also challenged my assumptions about how to read it.

Because we are so well trained in the literary mechanisms of realism, most readers use that as their reading strategy: they expect literary books to reflect the world as it is in crucial ways. Fiction plays

against a backdrop of what we have agreed signifies real life. I said to a friend who was avidly defending the book's realism against my sense that it was something else, "What about all of the kidnapping? If North Koreans were trawling the coast of Japan randomly kidnapping people, wouldn't we know about it?" "I Googled it," she said. "It's true. North Korea is known for its kidnapping program." She was right. I Googled it too. I also Googled how much time Adam Johnson had spent in North Korea and several other aspects of the book, trying to get my footing. I still don't think it is a work of literary realism.

Most of the short stories in Johnson's new collection play with the same wobbly sense of reality that so captivated and puzzled me in *The Orphan Master's Son*. In the opening story, "Nirvana," a woman is debilitated by a nerve disease. Her husband's coping strategy is to invent a simulacrum of a dead president that he talks to about his dilemmas. The president answers him with clichés and politically infused aphorisms. I found myself trying to map the story onto present-day political or social realities, but eventually I gave way to the story's own

interior truth. This is a story about two people, neither of them particularly wise or mature, who are forced to grapple with a disease as it reshapes their love for each other.

In "Interesting Facts," a woman whose husband has just won a Pulitzer Prize for a novel about North Korea is dying (or has already died) from breast cancer. Here Johnson bends the realms of thought and action so much that I couldn't tell what was happening to whom and when. But instead of being frustrating, the experience of entering this woman's life and mind is intriguing. The wife, thinking about her husband, concludes, "He doesn't know a teaspoon of the crazy in my head." This admission speaks something essential about the nature of intimacy—how much of the crazy in each other's heads do we know?

The delight I experienced in reading this book needs further interrogation, however, because these stories deal relentlessly with dark subjects: debilitating disease, child abandonment, child pornography, and the legacy of the cold war. Each story seems to up the ante for the reader's willingness to engage in its imaginative project. Almost always that project is empathy—but it's a demanding form of empathy. How far can you walk inside the head of a man who oversaw a Stasi prison, was directly involved in the torture of its prisoners, and won't admit it? How about a man whose involvement in child pornography has arranged every detail of his life? Johnson does not go easy on his readers, and I talked to more than one person who had put the book down. It seems heartless of Johnson to ask so much of readers.

But gradually it dawned on me that the picture of human nature Johnson paints is weirdly optimistic. In these stories the human heart often acts against the narrator's wishes, leading a contorted person on a straighter path than he or she could have created—a version of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart."

It's not that there are happy endings. But even amidst death and torture one can say, tentatively, if one has been able to stay with the dark scenario, that love wins out.

Reviewed by Amy Frykholm.

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In "George Orwell Was a Friend of Mine," the East German prison warden continues to visit the prison where he was once in charge even after it has been turned into a "torture museum." For most of the story the warden clings to his version of the truth, although it is challenged by almost everyone he meets. Eventually he decides to make a video and put it on the Internet so that he can tell the world his version and contradict all the "lies" told in the new era. But in the making of the video, his certainties begin to unravel. The story does not have a happy ending (or does it?), but the heart of the prison warden is on a quest for truth even if that truth will destroy him. It also might save him.

"Are we dealing with one of the good guys or one of the bad?" a police officer asks in another story, "Dark Meadow." "Information is information," the other character answers, refusing the moral project that the officer presents. In a story like this, Johnson does not make clear where the empathy of the reader should lie. He doesn't, like a lot of realist writers, blur the line between good guys and bad guys. Instead he takes the reader so deeply into the experience of a "bad guy" that evil is potentially transformed into love; judgment is eclipsed by the reader's own growing capacity for discernment. The effect of these stories is moral, but always in unanticipated ways. It's the reader, perhaps, who faces the final, uncomfortable interrogation.

Christian Faith: Dogmatics in Outline

By B. A. Gerrish

Westminster John Knox, 370 pp., \$50.00 paperback

Brian Gerrish, who for many years taught theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School, has written an exquisite intellectual and Christian adventure that draws on a lifetime of scholarship. Gerrish understands the subject of Christian dogmatics to be Christian faith, a "filial trust in God the Father of Jesus Christ" that confirms an elemental and general human confidence in the meaning of the world and our existence in it. This conception of faith, alongside Gerrish's readings of Calvin and Schleiermacher on religion and arguments made by Schubert M. Ogden, forms a vibrant Reformed theology.

Sin is an estrangement from God and the order of God's world based in our loss of elemental faith. As sinners, then, we are gripped by a fundamental loss of confidence and an accompanying anxiety. Rather than glorify God we become occupied with securing our own meaning and worth, a posture that sets us at odds with

Reviewed by Douglas F. Ottati, who teaches theology and ethics at Davidson College and is the author of Theology for Liberal Protestants: God the Creator.

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the order of the world and brings with it a train of bad consequences. The gospel addresses our predicament. In Christ, who discloses authentic humanity as well as the design of the Creator, we are reconciled to God and adopted as God's children. Christ's work is the gift of a saving faith that is formed in us by the Spirit and the corporate life of the church, renews our elemental confidence, and founds an appropriate disposition toward the world. In addition, through Spirit and church we receive from Christ the will for the kingdom.

A "dogmatics in outline," Gerrish's book does not present "full and definitive arguments" but aims to open up reflection and conversation. Rather than offering an exhaustive historical survey, it draws on Calvin and Schleiermacher as benchmarks, supplemented by appropriate references to an ecumenical variety of classical and recent thinkers and followed by constructive remarks. While Gerrish's theology is clearly a reflective enterprise, its deep subject remains existential and practical rather than merely intellectual. The focus is on the relationship between creation (the doctrine of elemental and theistic confidence presupposed by redemption) and redemption ("the proper doctrine of Christian faith"). Indeed, like Schleiermacher, Gerrish includes a nonspeculative discussion of the Trinity that arrives at no final doctrine and questions whether internal relations between Father, Son, and Spirit are really required by faith's experience. His closing reflections on eternal life as a present quality and the possibility of personal survival remain centered not on us but on God's glory.

In my evaluation Gerrish's understanding of dogmatics is too narrow. He maintains that the Redeemer is the Christ of faith rather than the Jesus of history, and that the dogmatic task is to review New Testament data and Christian tradition to arrive at a theological picture that will kindle in us the same faith that animated the first believers. But he largely sidesteps the question of whether and how Jesus research enhances our theological interpretations (as it appears to do when, in discussing papal primacy, Gerrish notes that Matthew 16:18 may not be an authentic saying of Jesus). Indeed, recent historical studies have intensified our understanding of Jesus' message of the kingdom

as a reality with significant social and political dimensions. This insight, in turn, supports views of reconciliation and redemption that make it difficult to distinguish dogmatics from Christian ethics as thoroughly as Gerrish prefers.

Because of this deep distinction between dogmatics and ethics, Gerrish says comparatively little about how theology may interpret ideas of recent evolutionary anthropologists concerning human capabilities, morality, and our kinship with other animals. And his concern for a lost connection between Eucharist and table fellowship might be strengthened by John Dominic Crossan's contention that the practice of eating randomly with everyone (including the morally questionable and the poor) embodies Jesus' message of an alternative kingdom. Gerrish has methodological reasons to separate such considerations from dogmatics as it aims to comprehend Christian beliefs. But as they try to understand what they believe, many Christians do not.

This critique notwithstanding, Gerrish's book is a work of genuine significance for theology and the church. Some years ago, systematic theology—the kind that takes account of how varied elements of Christian believing hang together and inform a distinctive way of living—seemed dead. Theology professors adapted, no longer building introductory classes around texts by Barth, Brunner, and Tillich, but instead piecing together syllabi with less comprehensive and rigorous books supplemented by articles and excerpts. As a result, many seminary graduates today—even those comparatively more interested in theology—receive no significant exposure to a serious contemporary systematic project. The consequences for ministry have been harmful, especially when it comes to the perennial challenge of connecting Christian piety and tradition with the lives of present-day people and communities.

Gerrish's Christian dogmatics is part of a recent unexpected boomlet of substantial systematic theologies written in North America. (Another example is Katherine Sonderegger's *Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of God*.) If seminary professors will adapt once again, Gerrish's book will advance the theological acuity of Protestant ministers.

Baylor at the Crossroads: Memoirs of a Provost

By Donald D. Schmeltekopf
Cascade, 144 pp., \$20.00 paperback

It's not only in recent months that Baylor University has found itself at a public crossroads. In February of 2011 I attended a preview weekend at Baylor for prospective doctoral students in religion. There the vice-provost and graduate school dean Larry Lyon gave a memorable pitch for the program. "We're conducting a great experiment here at Baylor," I recall him saying. "Either Baylor will succeed in becoming a Protestant research university or no one will."

Lyon described how Ivy League universities had long ago abandoned the Christian heritage of their founders, while distinctly Christian colleges and universities have tended to prioritize undergraduate teaching over graduate programs and research. A few notable Catholic universities, such as Notre Dame, combine Christian commitments with robust graduate programs and research, but there were no such models in the Protestant tradition. As a result of the visionary leadership of key administrators in the 1990s and early 2000s, explained Lyon, Baylor was positioned to become that Protestant model.

One of those visionary leaders is Don Schmeltekopf, who served as Baylor's provost and chief academic officer from 1991 until his retirement in 2003. In *Baylor at the Crossroads* Schmeltekopf describes how Baylor transformed itself from a regional Baptist teaching institution into an internationally recognized Protestant research university. This book is both the story of a university and the memoir of its provost.

Schmeltekopf arrived in Waco in the summer of 1990, just months before the governing board amended Baylor's charter to assert the university "academic independence" from the Baptist General

Convention of Texas. After freeing itself from denominational control, Baylor was left at what Schmeltekopf describes as a crossroads: Would the school retain its religious commitments? Could it integrate these commitments "with a serious commitment to graduate education and research"? Schmeltekopf's answer to both of these questions was yes. But as the responsibility to implement this vision fell largely upon him, he soon found that these objectives are easier said than done.

From the earliest days of his tenure, Schmeltekopf envisioned Baylor as the Protestant Notre Dame: a research university devoted to the integration of faith and learning. He was surprised to find almost immediate pushback against this vision from faculty members. Some resisted the increased emphasis on research while others worried that the emphasis on "faith and learning" would hurt Baylor's academic credibility.

Schmeltekopf candidly discusses an episode in which the tension between his

vision and the faculty's took a "decidedly ugly turn." On the recommendation of then president Robert Sloan, the provost invited mathematician and philosopher William Dempski, an outspoken advocate for intelligent design, to establish the Michael Polanyi Center at Baylor in 1999. While Schmeltekopf and Sloan viewed the center as an application of their vision to the realm of science and religion, many faculty members saw it as "a backdoor reentry of fundamentalism at Baylor." In response to faculty backlash against a conference hosted by the center in April 2000, Schmeltekopf was directed to assemble a committee to evaluate the center. After Dempski issued a press release misrepresenting the committee's recommendation as "unqualified affirmation of [his] own work on intelligent design," he was removed as the director. The center folded the following year.


In the midst of this embarrassing episode Schmeltekopf laid the groundwork for the signature achievement of

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Reviewed by David C. Cramer, associate editor at Baker Academic & Brazos Press in Ada, Michigan. He will receive his Ph.D. in theology and ethics from Baylor in August.

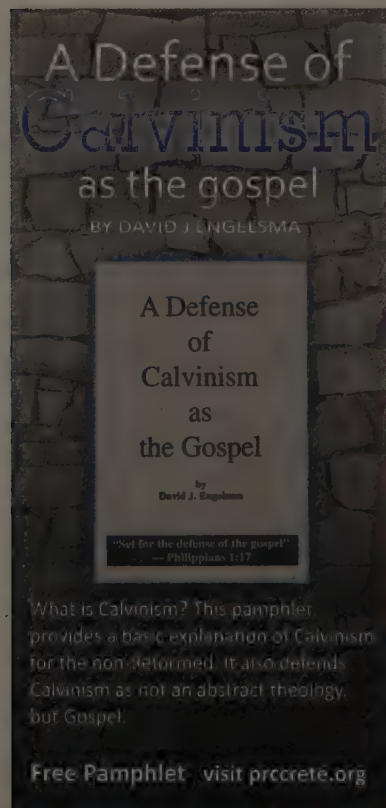
his tenure: the strategic ten-year vision called *Baylor 2012*. This initiative formalized his vision to deepen Baylor's Christian commitment while increasing its commitment to academic excellence. *Baylor 2012* provided 12 imperatives, which ranged from developing "world-class faculty" and "a top-tier student body" to building "a winning athletic tradition in all sports" and "a two-billion dollar endowment." Like Schmeltekopf's earlier initiatives, *Baylor 2012* encountered resistance from many of the faculty, leading to Sloan's resignation from the presidency in 2005. Ultimately, however, *Baylor 2012* and its successor *Pro Futuris* helped redefine the university's identity for the 21st century.

Baylor at the Crossroads offers a rare glimpse into the often veiled administrative inner workings of a Christian university. But Schmeltekopf says little regarding whether and how the institutional character of a Christian university might differ from that of a secular one. He fails to consider whether there might be cir-

cumstances in which an unflinching pursuit of excellence in its varied forms might be at cross-purposes with a commitment to Christian faithfulness.

An obvious point where he might have addressed this issue comes in the epilogue. Schmeltekopf mentions a scandal that occurred months after his retirement in which a player on the men's basketball team shot and killed a teammate. He quotes a *New York Times* article that describes how "the story unfolded, layer by layer, to expose the lying coach, the cheating program, drugs, secret tapes, clandestine meetings and an attempted cover-up at Baylor University." As I read of this scandal and the many layers of corruption it exposed, I half-expected Schmeltekopf to lament that his vision for Baylor had been undone. Instead he mentions the story almost in passing, as though such scandals are par for the course at major research universities.

Which, unfortunately, they are. Baylor is back in the national spotlight, not as a model of the great Protestant research university that it strives to be but again as a site of violence and scandal. The Board of Regents has acknowledged the gravity of the offenses, and they've taken decisive actions to better align the school with its Christian mission. Nevertheless, these recent events reveal that there is still much difficult work to be done before Schmeltekopf's vision of a Christian research university is realized at Baylor or anywhere else.



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America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History

By Andrew J. Bacevich
Random House, 480 pp., \$30.00

The war in the greater Middle East, as Andrew Bacevich construes it, has been going on for nearly 40 years. Its purpose continually changes: to keep oil flowing to the West; to put down rogue leaders like Saddam Hussein and Muammar Qaddafi; to fight terrorism; and to remake the Middle East. There are no heroes in Bacevich's narrative. Democrats, Republicans, civilians, and military leaders all come under sharp scrutiny. And the conflict has no endgame. Americans are by and large disengaged, and no Eugene McCarthy or George McGovern is at hand to challenge America's warring madness. Bacevich provides another case of the fraught dream of managing history that Reinhold Niebuhr critiqued.

Buechner 101: Essays and Sermons by Frederick Buechner

By Frederick Buechner
The Frederick Buechner Center,
165 pp., \$15.99 paperback

Selected essays, excerpts, letters, and lectures provide a chance for new readers to preview work they may later return to savor and for old fans to revisit texts they may find it's time to reread. This modest selection from Frederick Buechner's widely varied body of work gathers pieces from different genres and periods into a sampler to be savored, including pieces from *Whistling in the Dark*, *Wishful Thinking*, *Telling Secrets*, and his remarkable novel *Godric*. With an introduction by Anne Lamott and an enthusiastic tribute by Barbara Brown Taylor, the collection offers a rich range of life-giving words from a beloved theologian-novelist-preacher-speaker-essayist and encourager—the one who has found many ways to remind us that “God speaks into or out of the thick of our days.”

Saving Annville

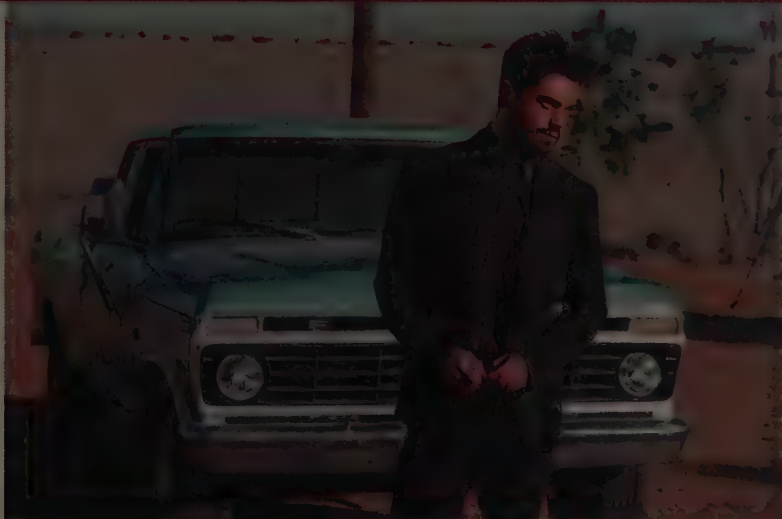


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RELIGIOUS BUT NOT SPIRITUAL: Dominic Cooper plays Jesse Custer, the demon-angel minister in *Preacher*.

In AMC's new drama *Preacher*, Jesse Custer (Dominic Cooper) returns home to pastor his dead father's congregation in Annville, Texas. The whole town knows he's a bad boy with a sordid past, and at first he seems lost in his new role. He reads verbatim his father's old sermons to a handful of parishioners. His throat visibly constricts when he's forced to offer pastoral advice to a congregant. But everything changes when Jesse is possessed by a mysterious force that grants him the power to make people do what he commands. Suddenly he's invested in his job.

Preacher is based on a comic book series by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon that has accumulated a cult following by pushing every boundary of sacrilege and violence. In the first two episodes of the television show, for example, bodies explode, people are set on fire, limbs are amputated by a chainsaw, and body parts are strewn across sun-drenched Texan cornfields. There are also angels, demon-angel hybrids, and hints of a dethroned deity wandering the earth.

The main characters besides Jesse are a drug-addled vampire and a foul-mouthed hit woman who builds bazookas out of coffee cans. There's enough violence to satisfy a small planet of adolescent boys. But there are also church budget meetings, stolen communion wine, and worries about the megachurch

that has a Starbucks in its lobby. These last details make *Preacher* one of the churchiest shows on television.

Convinced that God is inside him, Jesse becomes filled with a sense of righteous purpose and determines to save the town. It needs saving. Ordinary sins like pride, envy, malice, gossip, and anger compete with graphic acts of violence. In addition, the community suffers from widespread poverty, joblessness, and failing schools. Jesse calls on his supernatural power to settle a marital dispute about how much screen time the kids should have, turns the pedophilic school bus driver to the straight and narrow, and convinces the town's sadistic oligarch to "serve God."

But then his mind control starts wearing off in unpredictable ways. He realizes that it's not God inside him after all, but a demon-angel baby called Genesis that's been spawned by a supernatural star-crossed love affair.

I don't recommend trying to reconstruct the details of this cosmology. The theology is as excessive as the violence. But inventing personal cosmologies is a familiar tactic for making sense of messy human realities. John Milton did it in *Paradise Lost* when he invented an elaborate drama of Satan's fall from grace and battle with God. Kendrick Lamar used the same tactic in his award-winning 2015 album, *To Pimp a*

Butterfly, when he personified the temptations of fame, fortune, and dragged in the character of "Lucy" (Lucifer).

In *Preacher*, the more the metaphysics run off the rails, the more the ordinary lives of the characters come into focus. Despite his close encounters with supernatural power, Jesse is "religious but not spiritual." It's hard to tell what it means to him to believe in God. But he does believe in the church he refuses to abandon. Someone has to sit with the grieving parent, comfort the fearful child, and speak a word of hope to the worn-out single mother. Someone has to collect the offering, buy the communion wine, and fold the church programs.

In the comic book series, Jesse and his miscreant friends blow up the church and wander the globe looking for God in order to give him a piece of their minds. In the TV show, all of the action—the violence and the small acts of grace—happens at the church. It's the gathering place for misfits, outcasts, and seekers who stumble together into friendship, community, and sometimes even spiritual refuge. Despite its violent excesses, *Preacher* reminds us that although our battle may be against the powers and principalities, the real struggle happens when two or three are gathered.

The author is Kathryn Reklis, who teaches theology at Fordham University.

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by Philip Jenkins

New country, new faith

Over the past five years, migrants and refugees have flowed into Europe in unprecedented numbers, arousing deep concerns about their impact on host countries. What is not clear, though, is how much impact the new arrivals will have on Europe's religious alignments.

The main effect will be to swell the Muslim population. But alongside the Muslim influx are Christians of various kinds. Their actual numbers are open to much debate. A limited number of the new arrivals come from ancient churches in Syria and Iraq, but far more common are the African Christians who are not fleeing any particular conflict, but who are migrating in search of a better life.

Their presence has found an evocative material symbol in the makeshift tent church erected in the camp at Calais, in France, among the many thousands of desperate migrants struggling to reach Britain. Many of the church's attenders are Ethiopians and Eritreans, from Christian communities that were already well established when France itself was still pagan soil.

Another intriguing category of believers has attracted a great deal of media coverage in recent months: there is a remarkable number of new converts to Christianity, to the point that some urban churches are reporting mass baptisms. The standard picture of a convert is of a young

Iranian or Afghan who might have had very limited exposure to Christianity in his own country—barely even hearing the name—but who now publicly avows his faith. (Given the overwhelmingly male character of recent arrivals, I consciously say “his.”) Such decisions often arise from gratitude for the pastoral care extended by churches: not just the feeding and clothing of newcomers, but more generally the intense efforts by Christian groups to make migrants and refugees feel welcome. Kindness pays dividends, all the more so when deliberate proselytizing forms no part of the picture.

For Americans especially, such conversions are wonderful news, fulfilling as they do the hope that Muslims are indeed open to evangelization, provided that they are free to hear the gospel. And might those new Christians open the way to successful missions in their old homelands? Might Europe's Muslim migrants provide the foundation for a whole new Christian explosion across the Middle East and North Africa?

Maybe, but certainly not yet. Those new converts undoubtedly exist, but the phenomenon needs to be treated cautiously. The reported numbers are actually not that large when set alongside the total picture of the migration.

So far, the number of Muslim converts to Christianity does not approach the traffic in the other direction—that of formerly Christian Europeans accepting Islam.

Also rarely asked in news reports is what the converts are converting from. Western media and government often speak of “Muslim nations” in monolithic terms, as if every one of their citizens was a devout and knowledgeable member of that faith. In fact, many of those people are Muslim only in the notional and cultural sense in which millions of nonparticipating members of Western national churches might describe themselves as Christians. They are thus quite open to accepting new creeds in new countries, all the more so if they had some family connection with one of the ancient churches. Significantly, many of the reported converts are Iranian, from a country long deeply disenchanted with official Islamic rule and clerical power.

One thing we can be certain of is that any Christian expansion will take place without the slightest assistance from European governments, which are more likely to react with bureaucratic hostility. For decades, Middle Eastern Christians have been fleeing to Western countries

in search of sanctuary from persecution in their home countries, the bitter reality of which seems too obvious to be worth spelling out. Repeatedly though, European (and some North American) immigration authorities have demanded that asylum seekers prove their Christian credentials by a series of absurd tests. In Britain, notoriously, these have included being asked to recite the Ten Commandments or to state how many books there are in the Bible (presumably all non-Protestants fail that one outright). “What is Pentecost?” is another favorite.

Such an approach is ludicrous enough when applied to members of established Christian communities, who might have some dim recollections of Sunday school. It is absolutely inappropriate for new believers who grasped shreds of doctrine and scripture while they were living in deeply hostile societies and who hope for a new life in historically Christian Europe.

With all these caveats and concerns, these emerging Christian communities will repay watching, and especially the new converts. If those emerging churches endure and grow, they could mark an important new departure for the continent's religious story.

Philip Jenkins's Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.

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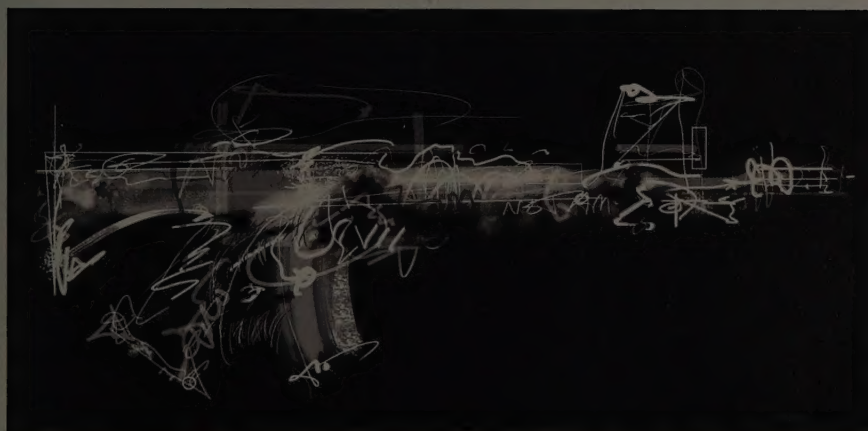
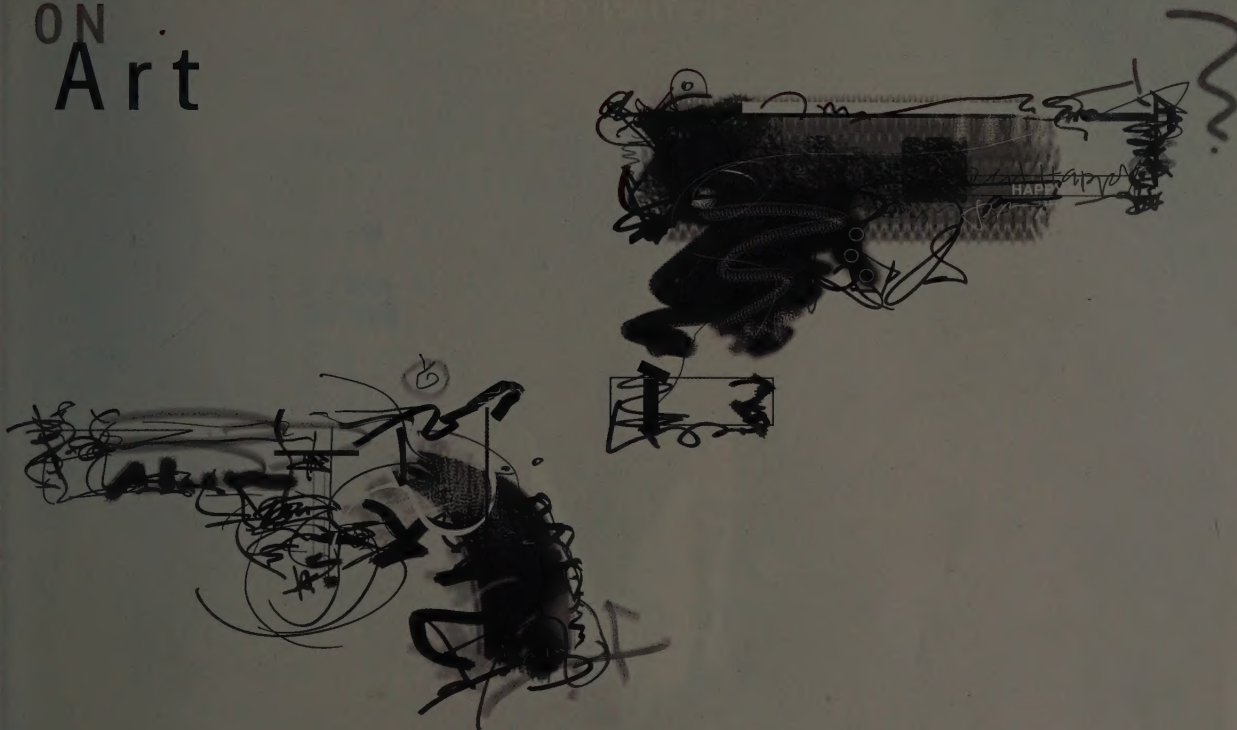
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Happy Down, Who's Prayin' for Me? (top), *Stephen's Small Loveable*, and *Kalashnikov II*,
by Roz Dimon

New York artist Roz Dimon works by layering one digital image over another, the layers differing in opacity and texture. For the series “Guns,” she worked with a digital archive of guns used in killings in the United States. She aims to open “a deeper conversation about these iconic artifacts.”

Art selection and comment by Lil Copan, a painter and editor.

THE ANNUAL
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by Jeremy Begbie

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Jeremy Begbie teaches theology at Duke Divinity School and at the University of Cambridge, where he is also a lecturer in music. His books include *Theology, Music and Time*, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music and Music, Modernity, and God*.



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